

CHRISTIAN COURIER

December 19, 2005

A Reformed Biweekly

No. 2780 \$1.60



Sea to sea . . . p.12

Blessed are you
among women...p.16

60th year of publication

A year of old news

Harry der Nederlanden

"We've never had it so good, but why aren't we happy?" asks a Canadian newspaper columnist. He applies the question to the public dissatisfaction with the Liberals. Even though Canada is peaceful and prosperous, the flourishing economy isn't enough: the Canadian people are not happy and content. A book published recently in the U.S. makes the same observation: here we are living in unprecedented prosperity, but Americans are not happy.

As we go into another year, the dominant mood seems to be a sense of anxiety and fragility. During the Cold War era, social science types often spoke of generations growing up under the dark cloud of nuclear annihilation. Nowadays there may not be one dark oppressive cloud - there are many small ones, each a cause for anxiety.

For some the big story is the war against terror and the so-called clash of civilizations. Although we are ready to concede that not all Muslims are aggressive and militant, when we look around the world we see that wherever Islam is in the majority it suppresses those of other faiths. It also supplies by far the greatest number of those ready to kill in the name of their faith and to kill indiscriminately. Moderate Islam seems unable to keep the faith from radicalizing and becoming ever more militant.

At the same time, in Europe we see a precipitous decline in Christian commitment. In the recent attempt at framing a constitution for the European Union, its leaders were more than ready to discard Europe's Judeo-Christian heritage, as if it were simply a spent booster rocket that now needs to be jettisoned.

Not only is the Christian faith in decline in Europe, so is the population. In the U.K., according to a recent report, Christian traditions and Christian worship are being carried not by the British population but by Christian immigrants from abroad. That gives ground for hope, but in most of Europe the immigrant population that is replacing the shrinking and secular original population is not Christian but Muslim. There are signs, too, that Muslims growing up in Europe are not necessarily imbibing an attitude of religious tolerance or respect for democratic traditions.

Others wonder whether the culture of secular fundamentalism that has been growing stronger in Europe (and here as well) would in the long run prove almost as hostile to the Christian faith as Islam. A European Catholic has suggested that many secularists are in the grip of Christophobia. They profess to be just as afraid of Christian fundamentalism as of Islamic fundamentalism, for both make claims to a comprehensive Truth valid for all, and this, it is said, is the source of all conflict and violence.

In the evangelical community in the U.S. this seems to be the front of the culture war. Many Christians seem to think that their country is at a watershed moment. Will it succumb to a secular humanism or liberalism that seeks to efface from public affairs every trace of the Judeo-Christian heritage on which their nation has been built?

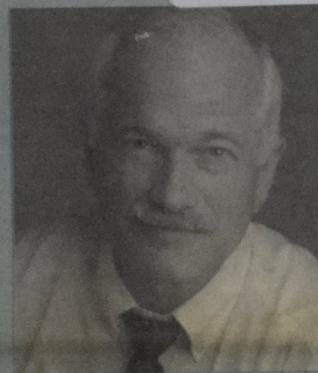
Other Christians are equally anxious that American evangelicalism is being coopted by a civic religion that blends nationalism and right-wing politics with a diluted optimistic Christianity

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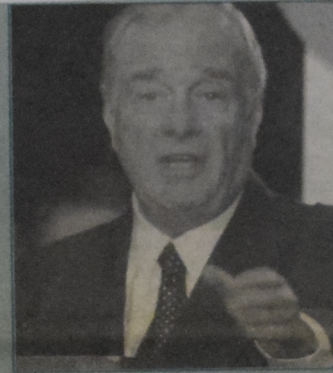
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A vision for Canada

Compiled by Janet Epp Buckingham

"Friends, Canadians, countrymen, lend me your ears..." (Who said it?)

"Fourscore and seven years ago, our forefathers brought forth on this continent a new nation..." (Who said it?)

"Ask not what your country can do for you but for what you can do for your country." (Who said it?)

I did not need to look any of these up. These speeches are not far from the front of my brain. Why is that? Because they call upon our noble intentions and make us want to hear more. They impart vision.

So, now the tough bit, what vision would we agree with? Unfortunately, we are not likely to hear speeches of this calibre in the upcoming election. For this kind of speech, a person needs vision. And that is sorely lacking. We feel the ennui behind "Without vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

Larry Matthews, in listing the 20 qualities of a leader, puts "vision" in the number two spot.

His definition of vision is: "Can see the 'promised land' in the mind's eye and heart and the group's place in that vision."

Extrapolating that definition to that of our political leaders, we would like to have a Prime Minister who can see in his mind's eye and heart what Canada should become and be able to lead us there.

Christians can learn a great deal about leadership and vision from reading through Kings and Chronicles in the Old Testament. We can learn as much from the failures at leadership than from the successes.

A few weeks ago, my Monty Python calendar had a funny sketch on The Silly Party. Their public platform is:

Raising prices
Destroying industry
Causing inflation
Ruining the economy

For those of you who are not Monty Python fans (or somehow mistake this for The Full Monty), this is a British comedy group from

long, long ago. I am a fan, despite their more risqué moments. They are the British equivalent of The Royal Canadian Air Farce.

But my point is that having a vision is not enough, we also want it to be a vision that we agree with. No one would vote for a party that is going to ruin the country, even if they do make us laugh!

So, now the tough bit, what vision would we agree with?

I am not the leader of a party and don't pretend to have all the answers. I do have lots of questions, however. Here is what we at the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada have developed.

Marriage

The Bible teaches that marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman. Marriage forms the foundation of families. God showed his intent for marriage in creation, and Jesus' teaching upheld this union of a man and a woman in marriage.

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News

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tailored to attract big audiences.

In the war against Islamist terrorism, the U.S. has put all its eggs in the Iraq basket. It is not just that American soldiers are dying and the outcome is still doubtful. The war in Iraq forces us to question one of the basic beliefs of the West, namely, that all peoples everywhere are longing for the kind of liberties and rights we have enshrined in law. Some of the foundational beliefs of our civilization seem no longer so certain and so solid.

If the U.S. fails in its attempt to plant the seeds of democracy and liberty in the middle east, what does that mean for the future of Europe and for the long heritage of European civilization?

But the challenge to basic institutions comes from within as well as from without. Over the next decade, if trends continue, there will be just as many kids who come from broken households or single parent households as those who have both a mother and father. We have already seen something of the toll that divorce has had on our society. And in some American cities the number of children born to unwed mothers exceeds those born to married couples.

Other social ills — drug abuse, alcoholism, wife abuse, porno-graphy, gambling addiction, criminality, gun violence — make us wonder whether our celebrated way of life with its excessive liberties is worth defending.

A few decades ago sociologists spoke of the ever growing hours of leisure that awaited us as the product of technology — hours we could devote to family and culture instead of to work. Instead, mothers and fathers are now so busy working they can't find time to raise their children, in spite

of the fact that they have only one or two to raise instead of from four to six. There's hardly a news magazine on the market that hasn't carried some stories on stress and stress-related illnesses over the past year. Why are we working so hard?

One Canadian journalist titled his story on climate change "The year the earth hit back." He is referring, of course, to the record number of hurricanes that struck the U.S. and Central America with unprecedented fury this past year. Climate change activists have, of course, been making apocalyptic predictions of disaster for two decades, but the devastation brought by the hurricanes have hit us all in the solar plexus. This is about more than carbon dioxide emissions and Kyoto.

A long course of development and 'civilization' built on science, technology, industrial growth, global markets and so on is put in question. On the one hand, we have increased pollution and exhaustion on land, sea and air, and on the other, the resources for continued growth, like oil and water, are dwindling as demand rises.

We speak unendingly of a more sustainable development and of the failure of old models of development, models we once thought would rescue people around the globe from poverty and hunger, provide gainful employment and make healthcare and education available to all. But we cannot seem to break through to new, more viable ways of living together and sharing the bounties of this amazingly rich creation.

We diddle with alternate sources of energy from solar and wind energy to hydrogen and bio-fuel, but we all know that none of these can really replace our dependency on oil. In

other words, our way into the future is far from clear. The only thing that seems clear is that there are stupendous and perhaps cataclysmic changes in the future of our Western societies, changes forced on us not by ideology but by the limitations of our environment.

Along with the hurricanes, a tsunami and an earthquake as well as the usual assortment of floods and droughts have brought home to us how little we have achieved in the way of mastery over our environment. This has been brought home not just by the devastation these disasters brought, but even more so by how poorly even the richest and most advanced country in the world was able to respond and provide help for the stricken. It was not just humbling; it was humiliating.

The U.S. was humiliated by its New Orleans, but France was humiliated by night after night of arson in its "immigrant" suburbs. Canada was humiliated by conditions on one of its "First Nations" reserves. The U.S. threw billions of dollars at the New Orleans scandal, and Canada did the same with Kashechewan, even though both nations have long ago learned that simply throwing more money at such problems does little to solve them.

More and more we find ourselves acting, I believe, out of a bad conscience. We feel somehow guilty for having achieved this unprecedented degree of prosperity and wealth, and we are aware that we can sustain it only at the cost of others remaining poor. So our prosperity does not make us happy. But we are too busy keeping the machine going and paying our bills to change gears, to contemplate any drastic shifts.

We know things cannot go on as they are, but no coherent vision for an alternate course for our society has yet emerged from the debris of collapsed visions. We are aware of living on borrowed time and so are reluctant to speak too boldly and optimistically to our children for fear that we will feed them visions that will prove every bit as faulty and fragile as those that brought us to this pass.

So far I have provided nothing from which to build an optimistic outlook on the coming year. And that is as it should be. Our hope is not in the engines and institutions of this or of any other civilization or empire. Our hope is rooted in nothing less than the great acts of God that demonstrate the continuing rule of our Creator and Redeemer as he leads this world to its consummation — when he will be acknowledged as King of kings and Lord of lords.

In the light of that sure hope, we look back and see the Lord's faithfulness even in the rickety, ageing structures of our sinful civilization. Take ourselves as an example. Not nearly everything this immigrant community has done over the past 60 years as partially recorded in these pages have been edifying. Perhaps most of it will not survive the purifying fire. But those who have eyes to see will see not just a parade of human folly but also the faithful dwelling of God with his people.

Those who see this will not be happy with the present state of affairs, but they will nevertheless go on in hope and even in joy, for the Lord promises not just new hearts but a new heaven and a new earth in which he will be all and in all.

Amen. Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus.

Vision ... continued from page 1

Marriage has been redefined to include same-sex couples. The federal government passed Bill C-38 to change the definition of marriage for civil purposes to "between two persons."

Would you support the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others?

Will you take active steps to re-affirm the heterosexual definition of marriage?

What will you do to protect the religious freedom of those who do not support same-sex marriages?

Protection of children

As Christians, we are called to care for the vulnerable and to uphold human dignity. The Old and New Testaments include instructions to care for "the widow and the orphan," those who were powerless and vulnerable in their society.

Canada has become a destination for child sex tourism. Canada has one of the lowest ages of consent to sexual activity among western countries, at 14 years of age. As a result, Canada has become a destination for child sex tourism. Our young people are

vulnerable to sexual predators. Under our current laws, sexual predators can only be prosecuted if they lure young people over the internet or are in positions of authority over the young person. The best protection would be to raise the age of consent.

Do you support raising the age of consent for sexual activity?

Family

God has established families to provide physical, emotional and spiritual care for their members. Marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman and forms the foundation of families.

Canadian families are increasingly under stress. Family breakdown is common, with 37 percent of marriages expected to end in divorce within 30 years. Children are experiencing their parents' separation at increasingly younger ages. As the Canadian population ages, parents become increasingly dependent on their children for assistance.

Do you support a family impact assessment of federal programs and policies?

What policies do you propose to reduce the stress on families and decrease the rate

of family breakdown?

Religious freedom in Canada

Our primary responsibility as Christians is to worship God and obey him. An integral part of worshiping God is speaking about him to others. We obey God's commands by loving our neighbor, seeking justice and mercy, and respecting life.

With the redefinition of marriage, we have seen the Knights of Columbus in Vancouver and Calgary Bishop Fred Henry facing human rights complaints for their stand on traditional marriage. Marriage commissioners have been forced to resign in several provinces.

What is your view on religious expression in public life?

What steps will you take to support freedom of conscience and freedom of religion in Canada?

Poverty and homelessness

As Christians, we are called to care for, and bring good news to the poor and the vulnerable, and to uphold the dignity of all persons.

Poverty and homelessness are complex issues that defy a single, simple solution. Though there are common risk factors for homelessness, including family breakdown and violence, unemployment, substance abuse, mental and physical illness, those who are homeless face their own unique circumstances.

What will you do to address poverty in Canada, particularly as it affects families and their ability to care adequately for their children?

What specific measures will you take to assist the homeless?

Prostitution

God has created all people in his image as the objects of his love and affection. This is the foundation for our belief in the worth of each human being. Flowing from this respect for human dignity is our desire to treat people

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Janet Epp Buckingham

Politics

Two historic defeats

In December 1979 I was privileged to pay my first visit to the nation's capital. At the time I was a student at the Institute for Christian Studies, and a group of us drove to Ottawa, where we were guests of a research assistant for a Progressive Conservative member of Parliament from Alberta. Both the House of Commons and the Senate were in session, so we were easily able to see the two chambers in action. Question period in the Commons was of special interest, since I had been present four years earlier for question time at its British counterpart in London.

Joe Clark was prime minister in a recently-elected minority government and Pierre Trudeau was keeping his head low, as he had recently announced his retirement from politics. In the hallway we met in passing the late Stanley Knowles, then senior member of the New Democratic Party caucus, and found him an amiable and approachable person. We also stood on the same elevator with Jean Chrétien, who was more than a decade away from becoming prime minister himself.

The high point of our visit was lunch in the parliamentary dining room. We were sitting at table with our host when the 40-year-old Mr. Clark himself entered the room. He then proceeded to make his way from table to table, shaking hands with virtually everyone present. In due course he came to our table and, along with my luncheon companions, I shook the prime minister's hand.

Although this may not have been tantamount to a kiss of death, I had to wonder whether it was mere coincidence that one week later Clark's government was defeated on the budget. This, of course, plunged the country into a rare winter election that brought Trudeau's Liberals back to power in February 1980.

I couldn't help recalling these earlier events as I followed the developments leading to the defeat of Paul Martin's minority government last month. There are obvious parallels between the two defeats. Yet there are differences as well.

Principalities & Powers

David T. Koyzis

The Conservative Party of Canada is quite different from the old Progressive Conservatives, absorbing, as it has, much of the ethos of the former Reform/Canadian Alliance Party, including its western-oriented populism. The Cr ditistes are long gone, having inadvertently finished themselves off by abstaining on Clark's budget.

The biggest difference is the presence within the Commons now of the separatist Bloc qu b cois, which looks set to gain seats due to anger in Qu bec over the Sponsorship Scandal. The 1980 winter election precipitated years of what some observers have called mega-constitutional politics, beginning with patriation in 1982 and (possibly) ending with the Clarity Act of 2000. Even if we end up with another Liberal minority, the winter election of 2006 could bring back the constitutional issue, especially if the Parti qu b cois wins the next provincial election in Qu bec.

In the meantime, now that I've come clean about my encounter with Clark back in '79, some readers might like to arrange for me to shake hands with one or more of the four party leaders currently in the Commons. Whether in the classroom or in this space, I do not plan to endorse publicly one party over the others. Nevertheless, along with many Canadians, I do not find it difficult to conclude that it's time for a change. A healthy democracy is incompatible with protracted periods of one-party rule and would be better served by a more competitive party system.

In the meantime, make sure your parkas are zipped up before you go out to vote. And don't forget your toque.

David T. Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and is the author of the award-winning *Political Visions and Illusions* (InterVarsity Press). His weblog can be found at: <<http://byzantinecalvinist.blogspot.com/>>.



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as persons with inherent worth, not as objects or playthings. Further to this, our concern for the protection and assistance of prostitutes stems from the biblical mandate to care for the vulnerable.

Prostitution exploits the vulnerable, violates human dignity and is harmful not only to its participants but also to Canadian society as a whole. Prostitutes are victims of sexual exploitation; some are also victims of sexual trafficking, having been brought to Canada for the purposes of being exploited in the sex-trade.

In February 2005, the Parliamentary Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws began a review of solicitation laws under the Criminal Code. The Subcommittee has yet to produce its report.

What will you do to address sexual exploitation and trafficking in Canada?

What specific measures will you take to assist street sex-trade workers in exiting prostitution?

Do you support the decriminalization of prostitution?

Respect for human life

Life is a gift from God that should be respected and protected through all of its stages, beginning at conception. God calls Christians to care for the vulnerable, including the sick and elderly.

It is up to the legislature to determine what protection should be given. There are no legal restrictions on abortion in Canada. Abortions may be performed up until a child is born, using any means available. Court decisions have found that the unborn child should receive some measure of protection, but that it is up to the legislature to determine what protection should be given.

The terminally ill and elderly are currently protected by laws against euthanasia and assisted suicide. A Senate Committee report has recommended greater support for palliative care funding and research, to relieve pain and suffering.

What do you believe should be the legal status of the unborn child?

Would you support the introduction of legislation to regulate abortion in Canada?

Do you support the existing laws against euthanasia and assisted suicide?

What steps will you take to support palliative care?

Refugees

Biblical teaching calls us to care for our neighbor, particularly the vulnerable. The Old Testament instructs God's people to love the stranger who sojourns with them, in a biblical reference to refugees.

According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, as a result of violence, persecution, and poverty, there are more than ten million refugees in the world today. As Christians, we are called to welcome those who seek refuge in this country. In order to do this well, we need a coherent refugee and immigration policy based on compassion and care for our neighbor.

In 2002, Parliament passed the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), which guaranteed refugee claimants the right to a merit-based appeal if their claim was denied. This appeal was a needed safeguard to ensure that vulnerable refugees are not turned away in error.

In November 2005, after three years of postponing the establishment of the Appeal Division, the Immigration Minister announced his decision not to implement the appeal at all. Without a Refugee Appeal Division to re-examine the facts of a case, very little can be done to remedy a situation once a bad decision is made.

What steps will you take to make the refugee system more transparent, compassionate and just?

Will you actively support a merit-based appeal for refugee claimants?

Continued in the next issue. Janet Epp Buckingham is director of Law and Public Policy and general legal counsel for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada in Ottawa.

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*Glory to God in the highest, and
on earth peace to men on whom
his favor rests.*

Luke 2:14

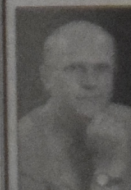
From my family to yours,

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Meditation

The kingdom of heaven and its king

S. U. Zuidema

(From CC, January 1961)

The kingdom of heaven is not of this world. But it is for this world, and for this age and the age to come. The same is true of him who is King of the Kingdom of heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ. He, too, is not of this world, but he is for this world and for the age to come. Actually this way of putting it is still too weak, and backwards even. For this age and the age to come are for the Kingdom of heaven and thus also for its King.

It has been said that in this age "Jesus is being crucified anew." This not true. It is contradicted by Scripture. His ascension into heaven has made him untouchable, so the world can no longer touch him. But he can still touch the world. There is nothing on this earth that is untouchable; there are no sacred and no profane places. They have no independent rights over against him.

We can crucify ourselves and others in this world, and we can make life impossible for ourselves and others on this earth, but no one has the power to impede the rule of Christ as King over this world. After his death on the cross and his resurrection, it is forever "too late" for the devil and his cohorts. We know that the night will end and that daylight is coming.

Although philosophies and theologies may banish him, and although political and economic concentrations of power may join with cultural forces to attempt to compete with or displace his kingship, all these attempts will prove to be forever "too late" and doomed to fail.

The reduction and assimilation of the Kingdom of heaven has always been a big business in the West, at least when the latter hasn't been completely forgotten. But these too are missing the boat and are also "too late". No one can coopt the Kingdom of heaven, because no one is able to seize hold of its King and use Christ Jesus to their own ends.

People have, of course, attempted to do so, by mastering him with their theological or religious concepts and by attempting to appropriate the power of the Kingdom of heaven to human power in history. But all such attempts are "too late." Just as the darkness has not been able to overcome the light because of the coming of Jesus Christ, so, too, after his death and resurrection, the powers of darkness cannot overcome the light of the King.

The kingdom of the devil is coming to an end, for this world is destined for the Kingdom of heaven. This is why the Scriptures give him the name King of kings and Lord of lords. Anyone who thinks that when he has seen everything of the world and humanity when he has considered such things as popular sovereignty, democracy, rulers and powers has not yet discovered the true horizon. He has not yet seen the Kingdom of heaven and its King. And he therefore has not seen the relationship of humanity and the world to this King. It is he alone who discloses the true and the only meaning of it all, and it is he who will make this meaning real.

There is something about his very self-revelation that makes Jesus Christ incomparable in relation to us and to the world. It is part of his own self-awareness in the New Testament. Therefore our knowledge of him escapes all academic, sociological, psychological and parapsychological categories, but also all our theological and philosophical categories.

This incomparableness of Jesus Christ and his sovereign monopoly is taught most clearly by Jesus himself, when he says to the Pharisees, "If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." (John 8:24)

Here heaven and hell are revealed to us. The dividing line is the "I am." Christ's "I am" is incomparable; it is his incomparableness. It is related to God's self-revelation in Exodus, where God tells Moses, "I am who I am." (Ex. 3:14)

The Kingdom of heaven coincides with Christ's "I am." It contains the fullness of authority, to which the only fitting response on our part is to worship and to obey. This "I am" is the unshakable foundation of the Kingdom. (Heb. 12:28) And from this "I am" flow all things that turn us from sinners into children of God, from lost to found, from slave to free.

Jesus "exegeted" this "I am" in many ways, such as: I am the way; I am the truth; I am the life; I am the light of the world; I am the door; I am the good shepherd; I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end; I am the true vine. Associated with this "I am" is also the incomparableness of his "I have come..." and "I have been sent..." And this "I am" contains the mystery of salvation.

All our explications of this "I am" must return to their source. His work and word lose all their meaning and their power when they are separated from this "I am." This is true also of his "I tell you..." No one can find a deeper ground beneath this "I tell you." Unless we begin our philosophizing and theologizing with this "I tell you," we will philosophize and theologize it away. Then we are guilty of subverting his authority.

This happens when we do not honor the incomparableness of Jesus Christ in essence and effect. When we pull down his incomparableness, his Kingdom is also brought to more or less the same level as our culture and power, that is, to the level of those self-emancipating powers by which we master nature and liberate ourselves from its powers. But Jesus' incomparableness is even incomparable with the incomparableness of our humanity. In fact, as soon as we lose sight of it, Jesus Christ is pulled down to the same level as humanity. He is ranked alongside of us and his work put on a par with ours and his Kingdom with the kingdoms of earth.

It thereby pales and withers to an appendage of our humanist ideals, eventually to disappear altogether.

We owe much to the struggle against national socialism and against all those romantic and reactionary movements that make all human relationships subservient to a national

whole. These movements left no room whatsoever for the Kingdom of heaven and Christ's rule on earth. However, we must add that what is generally understood under democracy also does not leave room for the Kingdom of heaven and the rule of Christ on earth.

Democracy is, after all, the lovely maiden whom the West (and beyond) has been courting. In fact, democracy has become one of the idols of our age, and like every idol it demands massacres and mass graves.

Recently I came upon a description of democracy in these terms: "Leave him to hell alone." That is, if my neighbor wants to go to hell, I may not deprive him of the freedom to do so, and I should let him go his way undisturbed.

But the kingship of Christ means that no one has the right to go to hell or to wish to go to hell. And no one has the right to let his neighbor go to hell undisturbed. The kingship of Christ means that he has come to save the world, and after suffering on the cross and ascending into heaven he has the right to save the world. This also means that he deprives us of the right to go our own way, especially when we want to go to hell.

Paul wrote that God wants all people to be saved, so as Lord, Jesus Christ has the right to rule all people. It is his right to lead us along the narrow road to salvation. The missionary mandate reveals Christ's passion for souls, but even more his right to redemptive rule over all souls. This is why the disciples are charged to teach all peoples to obey all that he had commanded them.

This is not democracy. This does not respect value of human autonomy. This is Christocracy. Only through this Christocracy do human beings acquire their essential stature.

This cannot be limited to Christ's lordship over our church-going and what we do in church. It possesses a universal character, just as the devil's rule has a universal character, enslaving humanity in its totality. The latter does not just make a person unchurched. Would that it were so. But it turns him into a sinner and robs his entire life of its purpose and mires it in sin.

The Christocracy is, therefore, also the beginning in principle of human civilization, for as Calvin says, "All religion is born of obedience." John says: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36)

All too often such clear language is missing from the church, particularly in its conversation with the world. The Kingdom of God is not an extension of current human aspirations, inspirations or transpirations. This is why all mission begins with the Kingship of Christ – a proclamation that is beyond discussion and must remain so. Not because we shouldn't be open to the unbelieving world; of course Christians must be concerned about the sufferings, problems and longings of the world. But this openness makes sense only in the context of serving Jesus Christ. It is out of this relationship that Christians must address the issues of our time. As a result, it often happens that the issues no longer remain the same because that relationship of serving Christ redefines what counts as the basic issues of our time.

This relationship may never be an extra, something supplemental; for the Christocracy isn't something added on – it is universal and radical. Christ has the authority to demand from all mankind that they serve him, and this is the core of all our love for our neighbors and all our love for sinners.

Christian Courier

Founded in 1945

An independent biweekly that seeks to:
report on significant events in the Christian community
and the world; express opinions infused by Scripture and
rooted in a Reformed perspective;
provide contact for the Christian community.

EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF

Editor: Harry der Nederlanden editor@christiancourier.ca
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1 Hiscott St, St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7

Tel: (905) 682-8311; 1-800-969-4838

Fax: (905) 682-8313; Web site: www.christiancourier.ca

Publications Mail Registration No. 09375

We acknowledge the financial assistance of the Government of
Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP),
toward our mailing costs.

Letters

Re: Criticism of Sea to Sea article

I have no difficulty with Ms. Van Hove's criticism that the writer, Dave Raakman, of the Sea to Sea article (CC, Oct. 10) celebrating the success of the tour should have acknowledged Elizabeth Woudsma's training accident which left her paralysed. What bothers me is the motive she projects not only on to the author but on all of us, namely, that it is best to leave sad events unsaid. I can't imagine that to be the author's motivation and I wonder why Arlene would suggest as much.

As for everyone involved with the tour, not only did we prayerfully acknowledge this "sad turn of event" all summer long, the Sea to Sea cyclists continue to be distressed about what happened to Elizabeth. We also give thanks,

however, for the way she continues to "praise the Lord, anyway!"

Ironically, at the precise moment when I opened the *Christian Courier* and first laid eyes on Arlene's critical letter, four of our cyclists were en route to Elizabeth to present her with her Sea to Sea cycling jersey, beautifully framed on a mat signed by all the cyclists and support personnel. It will hang prominently in Rob and Elizabeth's house as a reminder of our ongoing concern and prayers.

On the tour we learned to say "Let it roll" whenever someone or something irritated us or fell short of our expectations. Let's hear more of that in our Christian community.

Peter Slofstra
Tour co-chaplain

A personal relationship with God

I find the article about Dr. John Suk's nation-wide tour on questioning the validity of "a personal relationship with Jesus" (November 7, 2005) "interesting."

When I came out of seminary, I tried to preach theological ideas and didn't get anywhere. It was not until I realized that ultimately absolutely nothing is more important in life than relationships, beginning with our relationship with God in Christ, and began to preach biblical truth relationally, that a greater sense of health began to emerge in the life and ministry of the church I was serving.

Not only do the creeds and confessions incontestably point out that God is a Person; biblical language is fraught with relational concepts when describing God's relationship (you can't even avoid using the term!) with mankind. The most obvious and eloquent testimony to this is that God is foremost called "Father," and Jesus "his Son." These filial terms do not only give us insights on how the Persons of the Trinity relate to one another, but also, and especially, how the Persons of the Trinity relate to the people who are created in their image.

In my roles as a son and father, I have learned exceedingly important lessons about God, how he relates to us in love, discipline, encouragement, being quietly present and a host of other ways. In fact, I am unable to conceive of God except in personal relationship. I do not worship a theological idea; I worship the Lover of my soul. This is why more songs and more books have been written over the millennia about knowing God in Christ than any other person or subject, included human love.

The fact that the phrase "a personal relationship" with God is not found in the Bible does not bother me at all. The words "Reformed" or "infant baptism" also are not biblical terms; these are theological terminology which we embrace as being biblically sound.

What Suk seems to overlook is the Reply:

Perhaps my report on John Suk's speech wasn't sufficiently clear. He didn't deny that there is such a thing as a "personal relationship" with Jesus Christ. He critiqued a shallow and glib idea of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ – one that is very current in a lot of popular Christian music. Suk wants us to draw on a richer tradition that reminds us of the awesome covenanting God of Scripture who calls us to obey him and to do justice, etc.

CC editor

Diversity of convictions essential to political debate in a mature democracy

The federal parties' election campaigns are in high gear. Their leaders and local candidates are speaking their minds and pushing their platforms. They freely voice their diverse convictions so essential to honest debate. Candid discussions, involving fundamental principles and key goals, are basic to an open society and a participatory democracy.

However, it is disturbing that some people again argue that "religious" beliefs should remain "private" and that "politics" should be "secular" – that politicians and voters should not let their faiths shape their political convictions and that they should keep their religions and political views separate.

There are citizens (activists in their own way), who contend that Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin's views should not be influenced by the Catholic teachings of "the common good." As well, they contend that Conservative Opposition Leader Stephen Harper's views should not be affected by the Protestant principles of "individual freedom and responsibility."

Both men are urged to separate their personal faiths and values from their economics and politics; that they should develop their respective positions on key questions divorced from the beliefs they hold to be true and formative for domestic and foreign policies.

Thus, both Martin and Harper are urged, in effect, to suppress their basic beliefs and adopt "hidden agendas" as they engage in public advocacy for national policies and action strategies that affect Canada's future. Their political ideas and initiatives would then, supposedly, be "religiously-neutral" and "value-free."

I'm not convinced that this dogmatic ideology would stimulate national social cohesion and strengthen Canada's mosaic – built on mutual respect and mutual responsibility, by all and for all.

It strikes me that people's basic beliefs, core values and life-perspectives – whether my own politically relevant biblical faith or other people's religion or ideology, be it secular or otherwise – are pertinent to today's public policies and budget priorities. Inevitably, they shape what we think and do about social-justice concerns. For example: corporate profiteering, child pornography, family poverty, pollution, human rights, abortion, capital punishment, Aboriginal self-government and legal equality rights for gay and lesbian couples.

In his Sept. 20 speech to senior civil servants, the PM declared: "I believe in the good that government can do – that government must be the leader of national undertakings that express our highest aspirations and reflect our deepest values."

The question now is: which "highest aspirations" based on which "deepest values" does Mr. Martin propagate? And which alternatives does Mr. Harper propose? Also, what do Mr. Duceppe and Mr. Layton advocate? Which "highest aspirations" and which "deepest values" would they advance? Which visionary challenges would all Canadians and our governments want to embrace and practice?

Clearly, creative national projects and effective social programs, such as the early elimination of wide-spread homelessness, hunger, child and family poverty require open-hearted discussions and life-affirming actions. All include our "deepest values," and are crucial to their adoption and implementation.

Numerous concerned Canadians would welcome constructive debates, also and especially during the current election campaign. Our country is at an historic crossroads!

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Christian Courier

Member of Canadian Church Press and Evangelical Press Association

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Address all correspondence to: 1 Hiscott St, St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838, or fax: 905-682-8313

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PRINTED IN CANADA



Anniversary

New Year's reflections from the past

As we approach the end of another year, I've scanned a number of year-end issues from previous years. Let me begin with the issue marking the transition from 1960 to 1961. H. van Andel, pointing to the anno Domini traditionally affixed to our dates (now fast being replaced by CE), notes that every year that passes and every year that comes is a year of our Lord.

When we mark the New Year, he reminds us, we not only look back to the birth of Christ but also ahead to his return in glory. Every year again is a year in which Christ mediates for us.

"The years of Jesus Christ are added to the great program of his kingship. They are years he takes to complete the work of his Kingdom in this world.... We know that his work continues and is speeding on toward its consummation. Every year is a year closer to his return."

He quotes Paul's statement in Romans: "Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

Van Andel points out that the believer in Christ is someone who climbs the hill in the darkness to be able to see the sun rise. The sun has not yet risen, but we do see the first light of dawn on the horizon.

Looking back at the past year (1960), Van Andel notes the failure of the East-West summit (the East then referred to the Communist countries) as well as various ongoing wars and tensions, and he observes that these give little reason to be hopeful. "We are threatened by evils (onheil)," he says.

We could attempt to deal with them by talking ourselves into an optimistic frame of mind and conjuring up possible solutions. But faith offers a better option. By faith we may know that salvation is closer at hand.

This is not an excuse for us to sit back and wait, however, for faith is also a stimulus for us to fulfill our calling in this world. For the years of our Lord are also ours. We are servants of the coming King, so the right way to anticipate the future is to do our tasks, for we are his co-workers.

In another New Year's issue, five years earlier, Van Andel observed that no doubt there were many CC readers who were celebrating their first Christmas and New Year in this country. It is a time, he says, when the tug of family ties is very powerful and when we think of those we left behind in the old country.

To soften the loneliness, Van Andel points the homesick immigrants to Paul's letter to the Philippians. Philippi was a Roman colony. Although it was far from Rome, it still came under Roman rule and the colonists were very aware of their Roman citizenship.

In the middle of his letter to those colonists, Paul suddenly exclaims, "But our citizenship is in heaven."

Christians are all colonists, says Van

Andel. Our home country is heaven, but we are not there yet. So both those of us who are new immigrants in Canada and those who remain in The Netherlands, he told them, are citizens of the same Kingdom – we in one colony and they in another.

From the perspective of heaven, he concludes, all believers wherever they find themselves are immigrants, "for our citizenship is in heaven."

As I read some of the pieces in those early CCs, it was easy to imagine how much those immigrants must have missed their families in those days. I must admit, though, that as a child, I was aware of none of it. My parents, too, must have felt the distance painfully, but as children we were not aware of their heartaches. The local church threw a Sinterklaas party. We wrote out our lists to tell the Sint what we wanted, knowing we'd get mostly clothes. At the public school we learned to sing "Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer," somewhat bemused by the silliness of a flying Santa Claus, but we were dazzled by the lights and decorations and Christmas trees of the Canadian Christmas.

For some of us, belonging to two cultures was a definite advantage, for we got our gifts on Dec. 5 – almost three weeks earlier than our friends. Christmas day was a bit of a letdown, of course, because all you got was a little bag after church containing a mandarin, sugar candy, a peppermint stick and some nuts.

It didn't take long, however, before we had talked our parents into importing one of those pagan Christmas trees into the living room. I bought our first one with my own money.

"Four bits," the man said, sitting on the steps of his trailer.

"How much is four bits?" I had to ask.

"How much is two bits?" he replied.

I knew the answer to that, and I quickly dug deep into my pocket for my two quarters.

Since the trees were all the same price, I picked out the tallest one. When I dragged it home, we discovered it was too tall for the living room, so my father had to cut off a couple of feet. But that worked out just fine, because there was a large hole in the tree where there were no branches. So my father, a resourceful Dutchman, bored a hole in the trunk and jammed in one of the extra branches cut from the bottom.

Our landlord, who lived just across the lane, trotted over to warn us what fire



The last issue of 1960 carried this picture of Duncan Christian School, which opened that fall with 18 students in six grades. The church basement served as schoolhouse. Tuition: \$10 per month plus \$2.50 for each child. All six grades were taught by Miss Ann Bultsma.

hazards the trees could be. Some of these immigrants are so crazy, he said, that they actually put real candles in the trees.

My father quickly put the little candles back in the cupboard.

I began with 1960 because I wanted to begin with Van Andel, but let's go back another 10 years. At the end of 1950, Paul De Koekoek surveyed the preceding year (At that time CC still stood for *Canadian Calvinist*). He reported that there is now (1950) an all-Canadian classis in the CRC – Classis Ontario – and he expected that there would also soon be one in Alberta. Although eight new ministers came to Canada from the US, he notes that four left. That meant a lot of congregations were doing without, for a couple of dozen new congregations had been added to the CRC during the past year. (He apologizes that he has no exact statistics.)

Addressing himself to the newest members, he assures them that they will not be surprised by any "moderne dominees" on a CRC pulpit. To those who were members of the Liberated (Vrijgemaakte) churches in the Netherlands, he says, "You would be wise not to export the Dutch split to Canada." Good advice that went unheeded.

Confessing that the state of the CRC is far from perfect, De Koekoek points to several needs: we must commit ourselves to more study to orient ourselves; we must improve catechetical instruction; we must further develop our societies, and so on. And, he concludes, on Sunday we must not forget to pick up those brothers and sisters who have no transportation.

The other magazine, *Contact* tells us in the last issue of 1950 that 14,800 television were sold in Canada in the preceding nine months and that there were 238,600 more men than women in Canada. (The paper doesn't make any connection between the two stats.)

No special attention is devoted to the end of the year, but a writer from the West complains that *Contact* is misrepresenting their part of the country (where have we heard that refrain before?). We don't live in a deep-freeze out here, he complains. And we don't live in the bush.

To the charge that the immigrants out West aren't doing enough to advertise the attractions of that part of the country, the writer replies that advertising only brings out the fortune hunters who are looking for an easy buck. Moreover, slow growth is easier to handle.

P. Hamstra, who wrote a column called "Noorderlicht," also takes issue with how life

in Northern Ontario has been represented by "brother Veenendaal." The latter apparently complained about the remoteness, the loneliness, poor soil and dilapidated houses up north.

Heemstra sets him straight in no uncertain terms. There are at least five families within two miles of his place, he says. On a summer evening when he is sitting on his back porch he can hear the voices of his neighbors across the small lake that separates them and he can even see the lights of their house. Veenendaal even got the average wage in the area wrong: Mr. Antonides, Hamstra informs readers of *Contact*, was getting 60 cents an hour (not 50) harvesting hay this summer.

It is true, he concedes grudgingly, that there are a lot of homes north of Cochrane that look run-down and shabby and some of them are falling apart because no one has lived in them for some time, but once you get inside, you'd be surprised how homey those Dutch housewives can make it.

Everyone is full of hope, he says. In the winter many of them take jobs cutting timber in the bush. Since such lumbering has moved farther north, some of them can come home only on weekends. Most are, however, close enough to join their families every Sunday – at least as long as the roads are open.

I wondered how far north the lumber camps were. Toward the end of the article, Hamstra mentions a distance of five miles. No car, bad roads, deep snow means five miles can keep you away from your family except on weekends – and weekends didn't mean Saturday and Sunday, but only Sunday.

And when they got home from the lumber camp, after kissing their wives, those hard-working immigrants would collapse into an easy chair and cry, "Where's the latest issue of CC?" Because, of course, that's how they oriented themselves in this vast, strange country.

New Years/Stewardship

An Arie Dof New Year
(1955 - 1956)

Arie Dof

It is an unwritten rule in our family that once a year on New Year's eve, the head of the household takes up his sceptre to rule in the kitchen. He is summoned to deep-fry enough oliebolle to feed not just the family but also all friends, acquaintances and visitors who stop in on January 1 to wish the Dof family blessings and prosperity in the coming year.

I owe this duty to my time of military service. During that time I defended my country not with a rifle or rocket launcher but by feeding hungry soldiers. I was a cook. In fact, during my years of service I rose in rank from potato-peeler to master sergeant of the kitchen.

So on Saturday afternoon, December 31, the kitchen was once again my domain. Dressed in a pretty plastic apron, I prepared the batter, and after it had raised, I carefully dropped one spoonful after another into the hot oil that Katrien had set out for me in a huge pan.

As in previous years, everything was going smoothly, and the supply of golden brown oliebolle was growing steadily, along with my self-image.

About halfway through, the oil in the pan needed to be replenished. After a brief search through the kitchen cupboards, I located another bottle of the amber liquid and added it to the pan to bring the oil to its former level. I continued my oliebolle production until there were enough to feed the entire neighborhood.

By the time I was finished, I had no appetite for supper, since I had dutifully taste-tested the early products of my cooking.

After a truly impressive New Year's eve church service, the entire family arrived home about 9 p.m. A huge platter of oliebolle was set out on the table to go with the coffee.

My fame as oliebolle chef had preceded me, for our neighbors, Mr. Mol and his wife, stopped in allegedly to discuss the sermon, but they could not take their eyes off the huge platter of oliebolle.

The dominee must have heard about my skills as oliebolle chef too, because before we were able to dig into the pile of oliebolle, he too showed up – to deliver a message, he said, but it could easily have waited till tomorrow.

"Go ahead – dig in!" Katrien said at last.

And the dominee was the first to bite into one of my golden-brown beauties. His face, however, did not take on the expression of ecstasy that might have been expected.

I looked at Mol. He was also chewing as if he had a mouthful of cold mashed potatoes. Katrien arched her eyebrows in the direction of our daughters. There was a short, awkward silence.

It was broken by our youngest son.

"Bah!" he cried, eyeing his oliebol as if it were a hand grenade ready to explode.

Suspecting that something might be amiss, I took a cautious bite – it was like biting into an unsalted herring.

"What on earth happened?" I moaned, devastated.

"What did you do to these things?" demanded Katrien with the demeanor of a judge.

But I wasn't aware of having done anything wrong.

Our guests made a hasty departure.

"Thank you for the coffee," the dominee said to Katrien, needlessly stressing the word *coffee*. He cast a dark look in my direction as if I deserved to be put under ecclesiastical censure for attempting to poison a prophet of the Lord.

The Mols wished us a good ending to the year, and we were left alone. The interrogation could begin.

The family quickly came to the conclusion that the one point demanding further investigation was my replenishment of the oil halfway through the process. Katrien dashed into the kitchen and returned a few moments later with the empty bottle.

Treasure in jars of clay

It's interesting to watch a child opening that first gift, especially when there are older children and adults watching or eagerly lending a hand. A toddler may take more interest in the box and may even be distracted and play with the wrapping while older children and adults are more eager and interested in what's inside – the treasure inside the wrapping.

What's interesting is that as children grow older and become adults, one's wrapping or outward appearance often becomes more important, often at the cost of what's inside.

The apostle Paul offers an interesting metaphor that describes us. He calls us "clay jars" (NIV) or "earthen vessels" (MKJV) or "unadorned clay pots" (the Message). Ever think of yourself as a clay pot? How about a cracked clay pot – after all we're not perfect? Clay pots are easy to break, so it's really an image of vulnerability isn't it?

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.... We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

(2Cor. 4:7, 10, NIV)

My wife sometimes paints clay pots. She takes something that is simple and basic and adorns it with decorative art – whether it's a floral design or some interesting folk art scene of animals or a landscape. One of my favorites is a picture of just hatched chicks – right out of the shell. She takes an ordinary clay pot and makes it more attractive and in my mind more valuable. On the outside the decorated pot looks beautiful, but on the inside it's no different than the unadorned ones – just ordinary clay. Functionally, the decorated clay pot works no differently than the unpainted, unadorned ones. But consider what happens now that the pot is decorated: our level of care is now substantially higher than the care for the unpainted ones.

Yet the point, the apostle Paul is making is that it's not the outside but inside that counts, or more accurately, what is held inside that's important. A clay pot is designed to hold something. It can be used to contain and pour out something. That "something" Paul refers to is the Gospel.

I like the way Eugene Peterson describes it: "We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives." (Message p. 441)

There are some things about the Gospel story that are just simply too amazing:

That Jesus being God would humiliate himself – become human, live among us and die a cruel and criminal death.

That we are saved by simply believing in Jesus as Savior.

And that God would entrust to us this awesome message of hope. That he would allow us – simple, earthen vessels, vulnerable and easily broken human beings, like clay

She slowly, sarcastically, read the label: "Cod liver oil."

"Cod-liver oliebolle!" cried the children in huge delight.

Their delight was so boundless that it spontaneously generated a game: they combined the words in different ways: liverbolle, olieliverbolle, codbolle, and so on.

Our oldest daughter proposed cutting up some potatoes to make fish and chips, since Father had already supplied the fish. They were having great fun at my expense, and it was beginning to look as though the year would end on a note of disaster.

However, at the lowest eb of my despair, I recalled that the bottom half of our oliebolle supply had to be untainted with cod liver oil. And so we had oliebolle after all, albeit less bountifully than in previous years.

Reflections on
Stewardship

Rick De Graaf



pots – to contain the message of sins forgiven and life forevermore. Using imagery from the beginning of mankind: that we may contain fruit from the tree of life.

As we think of gifts and participate in giving this Christmas, let's recognize and take a moment to thank God that this awesome privilege is ours. Let us encourage each other as vessels that are meant to pour.

Worried about running empty? Don't. The Holy Spirit will keep filling us like the jar of oil that did not run dry until all the jars were filled. This precious treasure is for those whose lives come into our room, lives that we may touch. It is a lasting treasure that has eternity in mind.

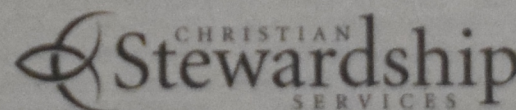
Go ahead, I dare you. See yourself as a cracked clay pot. Let the message leak out, in spite of yourself through the cracks. Better yet, start pouring. After all, a steward not only cares (contains) but also uses (pours out) what God has entrusted to him or her, especially the greatest treasure.

Stewardly Tip: A 'Boxing Day' Family Project. Consider a new tradition for your family and make space in your closets while thinking of the needs of others. Pick a time when you're all at home and make it a fun and giving family event. Gather those clothes, coats, shoes, appliances, toys and other items that you don't use or hardly use any more – items that are still good and useful (don't give junk) and then bring it to a central place in your home. Once gathered together, take a moment to look at what you've collected, join hands and surround your gift and offer a prayer of blessing on those who will eventually receive it. Then bring it away to your nearby thrift store or other distribution agency for the poor.

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Opening Floodgates

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In the meantime, it was a half hour to midnight, and we all sank into a bit of a melancholy mood. One of the boys turned on the radio, but raucous rock-and-roll music blared into the room. Turning the radio off, I was overcome by a powerful longing for the broadcasts back in Holland. They always helped to greet the New Year with a reading from God's Word and hymns of praise.

It was ten minutes to twelve; we were approaching the edge of an unknown future. It's always a bit frightening, isn't it.

I picked up the Bible and read Psalm 90, and we confessed our faith by singing, "In you, O Lord, I put my trust."

The clock struck midnight – 1956 anno Domini, the year of our Lord. We were no longer fearful; everyone was filled with gladness and hope.

Church

Independent Christian growth tests 'patriotic' China churches

Manuel Quintero

Beijing (ENI) – US President George W. Bush was probably told about the irony when he worshiped at a state-approved "patriotic" church during his Sunday stay in Beijing. Bush appealed for China to grant greater religious and political freedom to its citizens during his visit November 20.

The birth of the state-approved churches dates back to the end of the 1940s when one group of Chinese church leaders was convinced that Christianity had precipitated a series of imperialistic onslaughts against China. Those leaders later on came to constitute the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM).

In 1951 they looked positively at China's 1949 revolution despite its communist inspiration. They are said to have valued the revolutionary process led by Mao Zedong as an effort to recover national dignity and sovereignty.

But the Christian movement developing rapidly in China today does not mesh tightly with the socialist society and rather emphasises a strict separation between the Christian faith and the State. Consequently, it is attracting many who are discontented with the present regime.

The Rev. Matthew Deng, vice-president of the Three Self Patriotic Movement warns, however, that the rejection by the independent Christians of the socialist regime is fomenting unpatriotic attitudes and disrespect of the current legislation, thereby threatening the very future of the Church in China.

Members of the officially-recognized churches dub these independent groups "so-called prayer houses." Such churches refuse to register officially, and their leaders are frequently the target of repressive actions by the State security forces. Those belonging to the state-approved churches say the independent groups are sometimes encouraged by foreign missionaries.

Humanitarian agencies single out the treatment meted out to members of

those churches as a constant challenge to government claims about freedom of conscience and religion in China. Actions against them have prompted evangelical groups in the United States to pressure their government to demand religious freedom.

The US-based Christian Wire Service, one day before Bush arrived in Beijing, said it had learned that the Chinese authorities released eight house church leaders in the Henan region who had been arrested earlier. The agency said among those released were 40-year-old Pastor Huang Hailiang and Pastor Wei Lin whom it said had both been tortured with their legs wounded by interrogators on November 3.

Xiao Lian, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, says, however, that a continuing deterioration of the public health system and the deepening of poverty combine to foster a favorable climate for the sprouting of unregistered denominations.

One of the best known of the small groups is the "Lightning from the East" initiated by a group of women who follow an all-powerful woman, who has been likened by some to a female Jesus. Despite controversy around it, this group has grown quickly throughout the country, mainly due to the committed work of its "apostles", individuals engaged in exemplary service to the community.

Actually, "growth is not a problem, but Christian education," says the Rev. Cao Shengjie, the president and acting general secretary of the China Christian Council, founded in 1980.

The challenge is huge considering that the 55,000 churches and meeting points officially recognized are served by only 2700 ordained pastors and some 27,000 preachers, many of them also needing to complete their own theological training.

Says Cao, "Our big challenge is how to help new members to learn the truth of Christianity and not to be misled by heretical thinking."

Zhengding diocese were arrested in Hebei province near Beijing, where Bishop Jia Zhiguo was held in police custody. Two of the priests were beaten during the arrests said the Vatican.

The statement was the first public protest of China's actions against Catholics since April 2, the day of Pope John Paul II's death. On that date, Navarro-Valls had condemned a series of unexplained arrests of Catholic priests belonging to the underground church.

In Xian, more than 500 Catholics marched on November 27 to protest against the beating of 16 Franciscan nuns who were seriously injured in a land dispute with the local government. The nuns had been trying to prevent the demolition of a former church

Militants in India attack churches, force Christians into Hindu Temple

Vijayesh Lal and Vishal Arora

NEW DELHI (Compass) – Two militant Hindu groups struck churches in Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh states on Sunday, December 4.

At least 25 members of the Hindu extremist group Dharma Sena attacked a church in Raipur, Chattisgarh state, severely beating five Christians. Police took two of the victims, visiting pastors, into custody for questioning but refused to arrest any of the Hindu extremists.

After beating four Christians in the church, including visiting speakers Masih Das Rai and Anmol Kamble, the attackers forced them and another area pastor who was dragged from his home, Ramesh Das Manikpuri, into a Hindu temple.

Akhilesh Edgar of a local Christian organization told Compass that the Sena militants tried to force the Christians to bow down to idols and shout "Victory be to god Ram [Jai Shri Ram]."

"The Christians flatly refused," Edgar said. "Masih Das Rai even went to the extent of saying, 'You can kill me, but I will not bow down to the idol.'" Rai had been attacked and framed by Sena.

The house church, located in the Sarora Industrial Area or Raipur, has been worshiping for three years in the home of Kanhaiya Lal Sharma. Worship had started at 10:30 a.m. and was almost over when at about noon the Dharma Sena ("Religious Army," a militant Hindu organization) extremists attacked.

From 25 to 30 people arrived suddenly and attacked the fellowship on the first floor of the house.

The Dharma Sena had long planned the attack, according to sources who said the group had been threatening the Christians for some time. Edgar said that while there were about 30 people beating the Christians, another 200 other people were in front of the house to keep church members from escaping.

"When the Sena extremists had beaten

the four Christians to their satisfaction, they tore their clothes and paraded them through the entire area, still beating them," Edgar said. "While doing this, they dragged Ramesh Das Manikpuri from his house and also started to beat him."

Some young men from the fellowship managed to escape and called Christian leaders in Raipur by public phone. Edgar and two other Christian leaders, Arun Pannalal and Rakesh Jaijaj, and a few others with them went to the area to help. When they arrived they did not find the attackers, however, so they went to the police station to report the matter.

Later, the Sena militants tried to force four of the Christians to sign a prepared document stating that they had been involved in forced and fraudulent conversions. Kamble and Sharma signed the document, while Rai and Manikpuri did not, according to Arun Pannalal of the Chattisgarh Christian Forum.

At about 1:30 p.m., the Sena extremists brought the Christians to the police station (where Christian leaders who had come to help were waiting). Of the five Christians captured, only four reached the police station, as the Sena had released Yadav. Police sent Rai and Manikpuri away for medical treatment, as they had suffered the worst beating. Kamble and Sharma were released after questioning.

Following medical treatment, Rai and Manikpuri were detained by police for questioning. Authorities did not file charges against the Dharma Sena despite persistent requests by Christian leaders.

On the same day, a group of 15 extremists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a militant Hindu party, attacked a pastor in Jhabua district of the north-central state of Madhya Pradesh.

Police declined to detain any of the militant Hindus but rather detained the pastor for more than 10 hours for "disrupting public peace."

Catholics in China city take to streets to protest beating of nuns

Francis Wong

Hong Kong (ENI) – The Vatican has issued a protest against the arrest and beating of Roman Catholic nuns that led to hundreds of Christians in Xian, the capital of China's northwestern Shaanxi province taking to the streets to protest.

Joaquin Navarro-Valls, the director of the Vatican press office, in a November 30 briefing, noted two separate incidents during the preceding week: the beating of Franciscan nuns in Xian and the violent arrest of six priests in the Zhengding diocese. He said the reports "provoke pain and disapproval." The beating of nuns in Xian, in particular, "cannot but be firmly condemned," the Vatican statement said.

On November 18, six priests of the

school, which city officials had sold four days earlier.

"The night of the attack, 200 sisters were at the school to guard it against demolition," the Catholic Web site www.asianews.it reported. "When the thugs appeared, the nuns went out to stop them. Several men told them that they had been sent by the district education office. 'Then,' one sister explains, 'our sisters were beaten up with sticks. Some men shouted, 'Kill them! Kill them!'" Nuns from the nearby convent phoned police, but their calls went unanswered."

Some of the nuns were still in hospital when the Vatican issued its protest and one of them may be permanently paralyzed, while another partially lost her eyesight.

Church leaders and the government met on November 28, with the government saying it would return to the church the land where the school was situated and that the Catholics could buy back the school for 6.5 million yuan (US\$800,000).

The city government said it would pay the seriously injured nuns 3000 yuan (US\$360) as compensation. Some nuns said, however, this would not cover their medical expenses, while those nuns who were less injured noted they would receive no compensation. They said the officials owed them an apology.

A church Web site in China which had reported the dispute was blacked-out, and the content relating to the incident was withdrawn after the Web service was resumed.

Church

STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN - MUSLIM RELATIONS

NIGERIA'S
DECADES
OF BLOOD

1980 - 2002

JAN H. BOER

Nigeria's Decades of Blood

Dr. Jan Boer

Essence Publishing, Toronto, Canada

Reviewed by Obed Minchakpu

If there is any evil that has confronted Nigeria for over two decades without abating, it is the evil of religious conflict. It has resulted in the killing of thousands of persons, the displacement of millions of others, and the destruction of property worth millions of naira.

The destruction of lives and property has not only wreaked havoc on Nigeria's political life but has also impinged negatively on her image in the eyes of the global community. Today in northern Nigeria, there exist scars from the wounds inflicted on the psyche of the people as a result of the activities of some religious bigots who claim they are fighting God's battles.

Dr. Jan Boer, a Canada-based Reformed theologian and a former missionary to Nigeria for thirty years has written a three-volume book, entitled *Nigeria's Decades of Blood*. He expresses surprise that despite the endemic nature of these conflicts, Nigerian has survived them as a state. He believes Nigeria's survival in the midst of this tribulation is a miracle.

Dr. Boer, who served as a missionary in Nigeria for 30 years, writes in volume one that, "Nigeria has shown remarkable tenacity throughout all of its crises. Its continued existence can legitimately be called a miracle that defies all known categories and theories."

Disturbed by this situation in Nigeria, Dr. Boer decided to find ways of reaching both Christians and Muslims with a message anchored on the need for dialogue and understanding between the adherents of both religions. This is how he puts it: "I believe I have a significant if not unique message for the adherents of both religions. Both religions need to make certain commitments towards each other if Nigeria is not to fall apart or both religions fall into disrepute. The essence

Nigeria's decades of blood

of my message to Christians is "wholism," while for Muslims it is "pluralism."

The author's passion in preaching the gospel of peace to Nigerian Christians and Muslims is total. Without reservations, he states, "Both religions have to affect changes in attitudes towards each other. They need to move from hostility to respect. They need to develop willingness to listen to each other and to practice empathy. A sense of fairness and equality is badly needed. Both need to commit themselves unequivocally to the indivisibility of Nigeria and to the cooperation needed to make it a viable country again."

Dr. Boer believes that the enmity between Christians and Muslims lies with the competing world views imbibed by Nigerian religious leaders and religious theologians from both sides. He sees the solution to this religious tension lies in Kuyperianism, a concept that provides a perspective to contending world views and how they can be checkmated.

After establishing the contending issues facing both Muslims and Christians, the author goes on to deal extensively with the religious riots that have bedevilled Nigeria in the past twenty-five years.

"The 1980s in Nigeria were marked by horrendous religious riots that continued throughout the 90s and have already taken us into the new millennium. With the adoption of the shari'a (Islamic law) in a number of northern states in Nigeria, new tensions and even riots have already flared up, a process to which at this moment no one can foresee an end," says Dr. Boer.

Twelve northern Nigerian states of Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Yobe, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Niger, Jigawa, Kano, and Kaduna, are currently implementing Islamic law, a legal code being resisted by Christians in northern part of the country who say the law is draconian.

Volume one of the three books chronicles in detail, the various and numerous religious riots witnessed in Nigeria from 1980 to 2002. Some of the conflicts the author deals with include the Maitatsine religious riots in Kano, the Kano religious riots of 1982, 1991, and 1995; Kafanchan religious riots of 1987; the Zangon Kataf religious conflict; Kaduna religious riots of the year 2000; the Katsina riots of 1991; Tafawa Balewa conflict of 1991, 1994, 2000; Potiskum riots of 1994; Borno riots; and the Plateau religious riots of 1994, and 2001-2004.

Volume two presents the Muslim point of view on these conflicts. He allows Nigerian Muslims to speak in their own voice on issues that have pitched them against Christians.

Providing some background to the conflicts, Dr. Boer traces the incursion into Nigeria's socio-political environment of religious conflict to the jihad launched by Usman Dan Fodio, a Muslim cleric who carried out Islamic campaigns in northern Nigeria beginning from 1804, and the eventual emergence of British colonialism in Nigeria in 1900. Muslims quoted in this book

complain bitterly about the erosion of Islamic values by British colonial administration in northern Nigeria during the period of colonialism from 1900 to 1960, when the country attained her independence.

We also see the eventual emergence of a nationalist government as the British hand over power to the hegemonic Islamic north, resulting in the eventual institutionalization of Islam and Muslim feudalism. As a result, the northern minority Christian community became marginalized and oppressed, opening the gateway to religious conflicts – conflicts that have spread to all sectors of society – politics, media, and religion.

In a nutshell, Dr. Boer says Nigerian Muslims feel that their religious (emirs) and political leaders have betrayed them by allowing the secularization of Nigeria, a concept they see as satanic and against Islamic values.

In volume three, Dr. Boer presents Christian views and interpretations of the riots. In their critical analysis of these riots, Christians place the blame squarely at the doorsteps of Muslims. Most of the Christians quoted in the book criticize those Christians who find themselves in positions of political power in Nigeria but who have not done anything to protect Christians against the onslaught of Islam and fundamentalists Muslims.

Northern Nigerian Christians believe strongly that there is an agenda to Islamize Nigeria at all cost, and that is why they are being oppressed, marginalized, and discriminated against. They speak of an Islamic spirit of domination, intolerance, violence, and, terrorism. The aftermath of these, Christians say, have resulted in the killing of thousands of them, the displacement of millions of others, and, the destruction of their property.

The Nigerian government in the North, Christians believe, has been aiding and abetting the incessant attacks on Christians and the gradual Islamization of the country. They cite many instances of the government's inability to check the manipulation of its political machinery to entrench Islam.

These three books well describe the present situation in Nigeria and also provide views from both religious divides on the issues and the reasons behind their occurrences.

The most significant aspect of this study is that, Dr. Boer has not only succeeded in uncovering the evils of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria, but has also been able to appeal to both sides of the religious divide to sheath their swords and embrace each other in an effort to find a common ground on the issues that have divided them.

These books will not only enrich our understanding of the problems that have inflicted so much pain on Nigerians, but will also, help in healing Nigeria, a nation that has become sick because of its possession by demons of religious fundamentalism.

European Union report criticizes religious rights in Turkey

Jonathan Luxmoore

Warsaw (ENI)—The European Commission has criticized Turkey for infringing Christians' religious rights, a month after the country began talks with the aim of joining the 25-nation European Union.

"In practice, non-Muslim religious communities continue to encounter significant problems: they face restricted property rights and interference in managing their foundations, and they are not allowed to train clergy," the commission said in its 2005 report on Turkey's progress towards joining the EU.

The report was published in Brussels November 9. It said Turkey had ratified international human rights instruments and accepted European Court judgements, but still needed to strengthen and enforce its own domestic laws. It noted that minority rights were frequently violated, as were freedoms of association and assembly, and said "only very limited progress" had been noted "in terms of both legislation and practice" on religious rights.

"Non-Turkish Christian clergy continue to experience difficulties with respect to the granting and renewal of visas and residence and work permits. Religious textbooks have been redrafted to address the concerns of Christian minorities. However, it is still not possible for clergymen and graduates from theological colleges to teach religion," the report said.

Christians have often complained of pressure in Turkey, most of whose 67 million inhabitants are Sunni Muslims, but which is officially a secular state.

The government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has pledged to safeguard religious freedom as a precondition for EU admission in 2015, although some Christian groups have expressed scepticism about new human rights legislation and Penal Code amendments.

The EU report said Turkey's Council of State had issued decrees strengthening Christian broadcasting and equal treatment for mosques and churches, while 341 property registration requests had been accepted from religious groups under a 2003 regulation.

However, Protestants and Roman Catholics were still barred from setting up foundations, while non-Muslim communities had been subject to "violent or threatening harassment," it stated.

Review

A broken beauty – rising above or delighting in?

A Broken Beauty, ed. Theodore L. Prescott.
Xi-136, 89 colour illustrations, with index.
Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005.
ISBN: 0-8028-2818-3 cloth US \$35

Reviewed by Calvin Seerveld

This superbly color-illustrated book of essays, of almost folio size, edited by Theodore Prescott (Professor of Art at Messiah College, Pennsylvania) is an intriguing, curious melange of art history, art critique, and "beauty theology." The book serves as a kind of catalogue for an exhibition of paintings entitled "A Broken Beauty" germinated by Bruce Herman (Professor of Art at Gordon College, Massachusetts), who was determined to galvanize both artistic work and studied reflection on the matters of the human body, our historical brokenness, and the reality of beauty as a moral as well as an aesthetic affair (viii).

The first essay by Prescott is a deft, learned treatment of "figurative" artwork and the role of "attitudes" toward "religion" in contemporary art. He shows how Philip Pearlstein, Cindy Sherman, Leon Golub and Kiki Smith do anything but idealize beautiful human figures. They present "bodies" artistically as foci for sheer visuality or for socio-political critique of abusive power relationships that desecrate humanity.

In the next essay Florentine Timothy Vedon affirms the "Christian Humanist" art of the largely Roman Catholic (Southern) European culture from 1200 A.D. until the Humanist fabric was shredded by "modern" doubt, fragmentation of the individual, and Romantic artistic attraction to evil. "The importance of the Greco-Roman past for the construction of the present, unquestioned from Dante to Diderot, was thus fatally relativized" (36) and a decadent aestheticism, epitomized by Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and Bernard Berenson, unleashed a revolutionary avant garde art practice that has led to the abstracting shipwreck of our Western culture's dehumanized consciousness (42), writes Vedon.

Then Lisa de Boer (Calvin College graduate, Professor of Art History at Westmont College, California) writes a fascinating essay entitled "A Comic Vision? Northern Renaissance art and the Human Figure." Hubert and Jan van Eyck and Albrecht Altdorfer, she notes, give cosmic scope to landscape, which then shows the little place humans have in the spaciousness of God's creation (47). Also, Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel and Jan Steen depict ordinary scenes of

illus. 1: Bruce Herman,
Annunciation—from series *Elegy
for Witness*, 2002. Oil and alkyd
resin, gold and silver leaf on
panel 81x106 inches (detail)

unidealized humans busy in their daily work and wayward family ways (52). Such artistry, wrongly denigrated as merely "realism," says Lisa de Boer, really shows a kind of large christian, humorous awareness of the goodness to unpretentious human creatural life – so unlike the heroicizing Humanism of Michelangelo's Sistine chapel ceiling (53). She is confirming, in a different context, an evaluation made by Prescott (he gleaned from Paul Tillich) that "There was more genuine religious content in paintings of common subjects by Van Gogh than pictures of conventional religious subjects made by popular late-nineteenth-century painters" (4).

Gordon Fuglie (Art Gallery Director at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles), who with David Goa (Emeritus Curator at the Provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton) developed the conceptual framework for this exhibition (ix), has two essays, which constitute half of the text of the book (pp. 59-118).

The first piece is a spirited, tart-tongued indictment of "The Art World" he calls TAW (coined by Doug Harvey). TAW is that elitist coterie of influential Modernist critics (e.g. Clement Greenberg), patrons (Peggy Guggenheim cs) and artists located in New York City (from Marcel Duchamp to Hard Edge practitioners) who since 1913 have excluded from the major galleries and the art scene where it counted whichever art did not break with the tradition of ideal beauty, figurative representation, and narrative meaning: pure abstract form was imposed as the canon for High Art (59-60).

When the "Postmodernist" wave of eclectic whimsey gathered momentum and threatened the Modernist Art hegemony, says Fuglie, TAW co-opted Pop Art, Conceptual Art, Earth Art, Performance and Video efforts (61) into their Painted Word stables for "discourse and commentary without conclusion" (63). Oddball artists like preachy Harold Finster and Afro-American and Latino artists who bring the Virgin Mary into their artwork were tolerated as if an apartheid Bantustan (65,66 n.19).

To counter this domineering monopoly of TAW, which banned Beauty from an art public, and to give a setting and breathing space to discuss this exhibition of 15 North American artists entitled "A Broken Beauty," Fuglie champions the Neo-Thomist aesthetics of Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) and Etienne Gilson (1884-1978), which tops up and completes Fuglie's approval of American art historian Meyer Schapiro's (1904-1994) thoughts on beauty.

illus. 2: Patty Wickman, *Overshadowed*
(2001). Oil on canvas, 78x104 inches.
See www.seerveld.com/tuppence.html



Figure 1: Bruce Herman, *Annunciation* (2002)

Maritain believed there is an objective beauty which instills in viewers a superabounding delight in the goodness of life; artistic beauty can elicit a kind of ecstasy, a divination in viewers which transcends our mundane existence (71-72). Art has beauty for Neo-Thomist thinkers when the following conditions are present: perfect integrity, due proportion, and radiance (72-74). Fuglie believes beauty holds a "key to intimations of the transcendent or the natural order of the universe" which, "when grasped by human reason gives us an aperture onto the transcendent, the divine Other" (68). So, for Fuglie, beauty in art can provide "the potentially dislocating encounter with a transcendent reality that all sacred texts, and especially the Bible, desire to convey" (79).

While I personally cannot adopt this metaphysics of transcendence mediated by beauty, I noticed that Fuglie's very perceptive comments on the artworks of the exhibition reproduced in this book hardly mentions the matter of beauty. Fuglie expositis this loose group of artists' work by praising their rich sense of human body (Ed Knippers, *The Harvest* (Adam and Eve, the unblushing treatment of biblical themes (Bruce Herman, *Annunciation* [illus. 1]), the strong narrative content dealing, for example, with Marian theology (Melissa Weinman, *Schutzmantelmadonna*), and the evils afoot in society (Richard Harden, *My Breath*).

Some of Fuglie's commentary needs to help the viewer along to make certain the viewer catches the "transcendent" import or "sacred text" analogue implied in the artwork. Patty Wickman's *Overshadowed canvas* [illus. 2], for example, is meant to be read as a contemporary presentation of the adolescent Mary's being called to serve as "the womb of the virginal Church" (87).

In my judgment *A Broken Beauty* presents provocative professional artwork that deserves attention. It is so, as Fuglie states, that the reigning curators of the Modern Art Establishment, who believed that our demythologized world was practically godless, were narrow-minded on what could pass for good art. Art which assumed this was God's world and showed it was almost tabu.

We should admit, however, that artists who were more sound Christians than they were artists sometimes gave God-
See *A broken beauty* p.18...

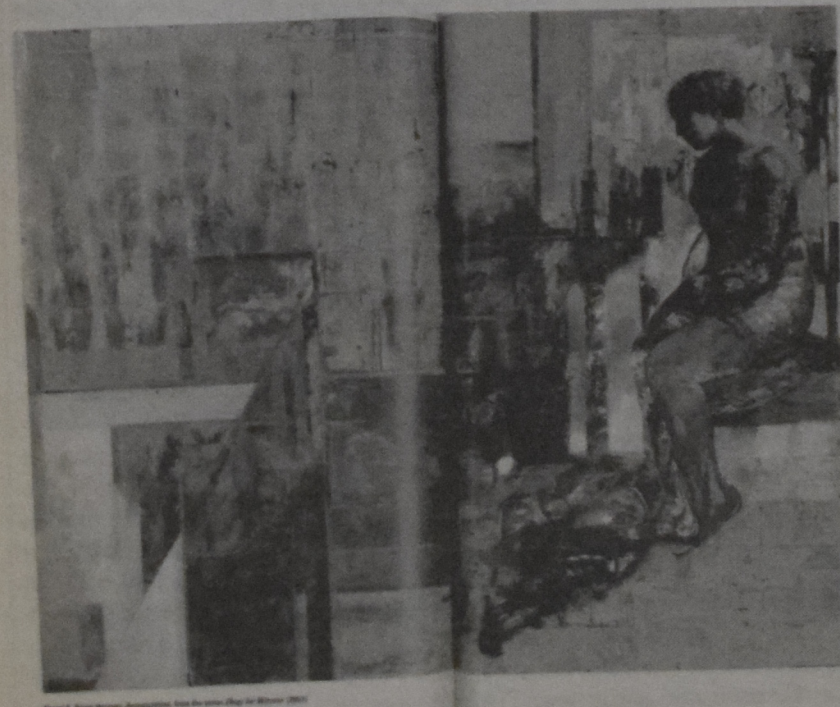


Figure 2: Patty Wickman, *Overshadowed* (2001)

Opinion

Islam with a difference

Harry Antonides

There are many similarities in the beliefs of Christians and Muslims concerning Jesus.

(Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Jesus a Prophet of Islam*, 2002)

God forbid that He Himself should beget a son!... Those who say: 'The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son,' preach a monstrous falsehood, at which the very heavens might crack, the earth split asunder, and the mountains crumble to dust.

(sura 19:35; 19:88)

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

(N.I.V. 1John 4:9)

Early this year the Jaffari Islamic Centre, located in an upscale north Toronto suburb, invited members of surrounding churches to a get-acquainted meeting at their mosque.

Together with several dozen others I attended this meeting where we were introduced to a form of Islam that was very different from that proclaimed by the jihadists.

A false image of Islam?

The theme for the evening was the natural alliance between Christianity, Judaism and Islam, as explained in a three-page handout, written by Harun Yahya. He stated that some had been presenting a false image of Islam, "as if there were [a] conflict between Islam and the adherents of the two other monotheistic religions."

On the contrary, Yahya claimed that Islam is "a religion of peace, love and tolerance," and that the Koran teaches that Muslims, Jews, and Christians should live in friendship.

To underscore this theme, he pointed out that these three monotheistic religions have in common belief in God the Creator, in the witness of the prophets (listing besides Jesus: Moses, Muhammad, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Joseph), and in the resurrection.

Further, he asserted that these three faith communities share a common set of moral values over against the atheism that is so influential in our time. Therefore these three religions should cooperate in opposing the godless and materialistic ideologies that are responsible for the many wars and troubles of the modern world.

Yahya's handout predicts that once these three faith communities carry out this joint struggle against the dark forces of evil, "the world will, in a very short time, embrace peace, tranquility and justice." It exhorts them to pull together in our love of God and in obeying his commands, so that "the world will become a very different place" and the wars, "enmities, fears – and terrorist attacks – will come to an end, and a new civilization based on love, respect and peace will be established upon this 'common formula'."

Jesus: A prophet of Islam?

Building on this theme of shared objectives, Imam Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi began his talk: "Tonight we would like to share our views about Jesus, the son of Mary, as a step in creating a better understanding between Muslims and Christians, especially in the wake of the tragedy of September 11th, year 2001."

He explained that Islam is more than a religion; it is a way of life, which can be divided into two parts: the beliefs and the deeds. He summarized the beliefs as follows: 1) belief in only one God; 2) the concept of divine guidance through God's representatives known as "prophets" and "messengers;" 3) the concept of life in the hereafter, and thus a Day of Judgment.

Rizvi said that in his traditions the number of prophets sent to guide mankind is 124,000, of whom the first was Adam and the last Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. Jesus is also included in this list. All Muslims must believe in all the prophets, without exception. If they do not, they cannot be true Muslims.

The Prophet Jesus and his mother Mary are mentioned many times in the Koran. In fact, the name of Jesus occurs 25 times and that of Mary 34 times; a chapter in the Koran is named after her. (sura 19, "Maryam")

Rizvi reviewed the main themes in the Koran regarding Mary's own birth, her being chosen to become the mother of Jesus, and his miraculous birth, as well as his healing ministry.

The Koran describes a strange scene wherein Mary is first accused of having committed adultery. The accusing crowd is dumbstruck when they hear the baby Jesus speak, saying, among other things: "I am a servant of God, He

has given me the Book, and has made me a prophet and has made me a blessed person wherever I may be...." (Sura 19: 29-34; We were shown a short film in which this scene was re-enacted.)

Rizvi next turned to the difference between the Islamic and Christian beliefs about Jesus. His blunt message was that Jesus is not the Son of God: "The Islamic perspective of the Almighty is such that God cannot be confined to any material or human dimension; He is the Creator and cannot be envisioned as a created being." Then Rizvi stated that Jesus himself, according to the Koran, never claimed to be God's son.

To clinch that statement he referred to a discussion between the Prophet Muhammad and a Christian delegate who asked his opinion about Jesus. The Prophet answered that Jesus was an important prophet and messenger, that's all. When the Christian pressed him to explain the miraculous birth of Jesus, Muhammad replied that the birth of Jesus was like that of Adam, whom God created out of the dust. (see sura 3:59)

The second major difference mentioned by Rizvi is that Islam denies the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. The Koran states: "They did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it only appeared to them so... They surely did not kill him; rather God raised him unto Himself." (sura 4: 157-158)

Re-writing the story of salvation

To deny what the Bible clearly teaches about the two natures of Christ and the crucifixion amounts to a denial of what lies at the heart of the Christian faith. For Rizvi to claim that there is an essential similarity between the two faiths is a preposterous denial of the very essence of biblical Christianity.

Such denial arises out of a failure to understand the essence of the historic Christian faith. That faith is summarized in the central message of the Bible: that Christ took on human form to take upon himself the sin of the world and thus to reconcile sinful people to a holy God. This is the good news of great joy the angels announced at the birth of the Messiah, and no one has the right to falsify that message.

But Rizvi had one more arrow on his bow, namely, the Islamic

view of eschatology, of last things. He claimed that Muslims share the Christians' expectation of the return of Jesus. According to the canonical sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, "Jesus will return to the earth before the end of the world to assist the Mahdi*, the Muslim Messiah, in establishing the Kingdom of God on this earth. That will be the dawn of true peace on the earth."

He concluded by saying that his overview had shown that Islam and Christianity are closer than is often portrayed. He said that when considering the coming of the Islamic

Messiah, the Mahdi, and the return of Jesus, "we see a great closeness between these two faiths. With this optimistic view of [the] future, I end with the prayer that may God hasten the special day when peace and harmony will prevail on the global level."

The speech was followed by a question and answer session. Most of the questions were easy and voiced in a deferential tone. Others asked more penetrating questions about the harsh words in the Koran for non-Muslims, the lack of freedom in Muslim-ruled countries, the preaching and deeds of Islamic jihad, and the denial in the Koran of Christ's deity and crucifixion. These were met with curt matter-of-fact statements. The speaker was supremely self-confident; there was no real debate or discussion.

A tangled web

I think we should welcome attempts by Muslim leaders to reach out to Christians and Jews. We should also be ready to reciprocate. But the message presented to us at this mosque gives rise to some serious reservations.

First of all, the irony of what is attempted by these Muslim leaders should not escape us. It brings to the surface the basic contrast between Christianity and Islam – a contrast that is mirrored in the difference between Western, democratic countries and those governed by sharia (Koranic) law.

The bitter truth is that if non-Muslims would do something similar in sharia-law governed countries, such as denying that Muhammad is the true Prophet



of God, they would be accused of blasphemy and be subject to the death penalty. The irony goes even deeper in that if these Toronto-based Muslims would promote their brand of Islam in these same countries, they would also be denounced as apostates guilty of a capital offence.

There are obviously different strands within the broader Muslim community. It is clear that Muslim extremists must be seen for what they are, a threat to the rest of us and thus to world peace. But I wonder whether the soft-line approach of this Toronto mosque is not just as misleading and dangerous.

The picture is also confusing on the Christian side. The fact is that the liberal branch of Christianity would have no objection to the Islamic view of Christ, salvation, and the Bible. Our challenge is to untangle this confusing mix and arrive at some clarity.

I write as a believer in the historic Christian faith, which according to biblical revelation is centered on the Lordship of Christ in the creation and redemption of the world. Therefore I see a number of serious problems with the presentation of Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi and like-minded Muslim leaders. The main objection is that it is a gross misrepresentation of the core message of the Bible.

It is furthermore a misrepresentation of the Koran and the other Islamic scriptures, since they contain many sections in which Christians and Jews are depicted as Infidels, to be treated as inferior ("dhimmitude") people, coerced into accepting Islam, or to be killed.

Continued on page 16...

100 Years

SeatoSea: celebrating 100 years on two wheels

Brian Dexter

The big SeatoSea bike ride across Canada ended three months ago but its participants and supporters are still on a high. It was an adventure of extraordinary commitment and grit that saw ordinary churchgoers aged 18 to 74 complete the country's largest trans-continental cycling trip in history as a significant witness to their Christian faith.

Even novice riders managed to get through the punishing 61 days of pedaling to do the 7,125 km between Vancouver and Halifax. The tour started June 25 and ended September 3. Amazingly, the distance covered was nearly twice the 3,608 km pedaled by professional cyclists in this year's Tour de France. The entire route was done by 94 participants while a further 63 did at least three major stages, Vancouver to Regina; Regina to Guelph and Guelph to Halifax.

Tour manager Ed Witvoet of Burlington, Ont., spent months on the road making arrangements for the trip. About a third of the 157 tour participants were aged between 50 and 74 but by no means over the hill. A wonderful testimony, for sure, to what older people can accomplish if they are blessed with good health or able to work at keeping fit and get into a training program.

Since the end of SeatoSea, many participants have talked about their experiences to church congregations, special receptions have been held for them, and at Christmas the trip is sure to be a highlight of conversation at family gatherings. The tour received flag-waving welcomes in scores of communities as cyclists passed through over several hours, either in groups or on their own, all wearing nifty purple and blue SeatoSea garb and special yellow safety vests that lit up in the dark.

Sadly, however, the event, was effectively ignored by all of Canada's mainstream media – apart from a few video clips on CTV, a story in the Ottawa Citizen and a few brief mentions in community papers. In Toronto, the country's

media centre, the ride got no coverage in the major dailies, even though details were sent well in advance to all newsrooms.

Of course, lack of attention paid to the ride by major media isn't too surprising. One former editor at a big Toronto daily, now happily retired in British Columbia, said that for sure the ride was a legitimate candidate for extensive media coverage. He added: "However, it's hard to get good news about church things, God and Christianity into the big papers anymore. We've turned into a secular society and political correctness rules."

However, once the tour got going, CRC members across the country tuned in big time. A rally and service in Guelph, Ont., on Sunday, August 14 attracted 6,200 people. It was the largest gathering of CRC members in Canada in the denomination's history. Terry Veldboom, 37, of Vineland, Ontario who rode Sea-to-sea, said: "How awesome it was to be part of a church group where 18-year-olds mixed it up without reservation with 70-plus-ers and everything in between."

"Truly a representation of our church and the family of God." Peter Schuurman said of the spiritual journey. One of the riders who made the entire journey, he is CRC educational mission leader based at Guelph, Ont., who also went sea to sea, "It's been one of the most intense, most wonderful and most incredible summers of my life." He added that years ago he could never have dreamed of riding across the continent with only two skinny legs as an engine and in many ways the tour has been a miracle that portrays the splash of God's spirit in the Christian Reformed Church.

Schuurman noted that the oldest participant, Frank Versteeg, 74, a retired farmer

from Wingham, Ont., succeeded in finishing the sea to sea ride despite having fractured facial bones in a fall on loose gravel east of Regina on July 19. Versteeg, who had hip replacements several years ago and uses a hearing aid, was hospitalized for a while. Although he returned home to recuperate, he resumed riding at Thunder Bay – ten days after his fall – and just kept going to Halifax in a ride that averaged nearly 120 km a day with only Sundays for rest.

Schuurman said he hopes that cycling great Lance Armstrong, 33, who won the Tour de France this year for a record seventh time, gets to do as well as Versteeg did when Armstrong is 74 because in terms of what Versteeg has accomplished for his age on the cross-Canada ride he's "My world-class athlete."

Schuurman also noted that unlike professional Tour de France cyclists the CRC cadre did not have full-time personal trainers, massage therapists or stay in luxury hotels. They also sat on their bikes each day for two to three times the amount spent on the saddle by the fast-paced super-cyclists. As well, the CRC cyclists lacked top-of-the-line equipment and had to set up tents each night once luggage arrived in support vehicles.

Schuurman said that while the Tour de France is a great sporting event with much media hype its completion by the pros is not nearly as remarkable as the accomplishments of some of the ordinary folk who finished the CRC's sea to sea ride, a venture that sometimes meant riding ten hours a day with rain pouring down.

As co-chaplain on the ride Schuurman was often kept busy coping with the spiritual needs of riders including circumstances that nobody envisaged. On the first day the daughter of one cyclist died, the mother of

a participant died later in the tour and at the mid point a cyclist was served with divorce papers. Then, less than a month after returning home to his wife and having ridden safely across Canada Schuurman fractured an elbow in Guelph while cycling on an errand to an office supplies store.

Some personal highlights of the CRC ride were:

- Frank Westerhof, a retired farmer from Hillier, near Picton, Ont., celebrated his 73rd birthday the day the tour ended in Halifax. He went every punishing kilometre across Canada and began training for the ride a year ago with a \$5 three-speed bike he bought at a yard sale. When he could handle 50 km a day he bought a better bike. For his efforts on the ride Westerhof has been awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal.

- Corrie Pool of Woodstock, Ont., and Alice Witvoet-Oldjans of St. Catharines, Ont., both 66, were the oldest women on the tour with the most riding and birthdays a day apart. Corrie went the whole distance and Alice went from Vancouver to Winnipeg and from Owen Sound to Halifax. Agatha Van Der Starre, 74, of Burnaby, B.C., an award-winning speedskater, rode the 2,105 km between Vancouver and Regina.

- Kevin Rupke, 18, a Grade 12 student at Park Street Collegiate, Orillia, Ont., was the youngest to go sea to sea. Before the ride began he'd never cycled a hundred kilometres in a day. Strangely, he bought a hybrid bike for the tour for \$800 from an Internet seller in Halifax, had it shipped to Ontario and then ended up riding it across Canada and back to Halifax.

- Elizabeth Woudsma, 46, a St. Lawrence College teacher of Inverary, near Kingston, Ont., suffered spinal injuries July 26 when she was hit by a pickup truck while cycling near home and training to join the ride in Guelph. She is partly paralyzed, is in a wheelchair and will never walk again. She insisted on going by ambulance from a rehab hospital in Kingston to greet the sea to sea riders when they camped overnight

Peter and Marja Slofstra and their tandem bike



Halifax at last



Three cyclists skirting Lake Ontario near Brighton

100 Years

in Kingston. The married mother of two says that while God has changed her life it is not in a negative way for where she's going "it's God's path."

* Lisa Gysen, a materials handler from Trenton, Ont., chipped an elbow when she fell while crossing railroad tracks in Kelowna, B.C., and had to leave the tour to return home for surgery. She rejoined six weeks later in Guelph. As she rode through home territory many people turned out to hold placards of support for her as well as Frank Westerhof.

* Kyle Lane, 18, a part-time woodworker of Demorestville, near Trenton, was one of the youngest riders to go sea-to-sea but didn't mind slowing down to shepherd novice and older cyclists.

At the end of the ride in Halifax cyclists rode together through the city with Westerhof, Versteeg and other oldsters leading the way. They dipped wheels in the Atlantic at Point Pleasant Park beach and stood in a semi-circle, recited the Lord's Prayer and sang "O Canada."

Westerhof said that every day he gave thanks that he'd made one more day. Even so, he nearly quit once as his legs were almost too sore for him to keep going. Then, Al Leferink, 26, a fellow cyclist from Acton, Ont., came up from behind and encouraged him to continue. Getting in to Halifax, Westerhof said, was a really emotional experience but he also had a sense of relief "that I've finished my job."

Later the riders and many supporters attended a celebration dinner at historic Pier 21 in Halifax where thousands of New Canadians have arrived by ship over the years including Dutch immigrants who established the Christian Reformed Church.

Corrie Pool who rode a Trek 1200 Comfort bike said: "It was a beautiful way of worshipping God and a dream trip come true. My body was not as ready as I'd hoped but I was able to meet the physical challenge."

Tammy Bluemink, 22, of Edmonton, a student, said: "I made it all the way although I'd never been east of Edmonton before. My impressions of the country were great. I never really intended to be a cyclist. I thought I'd lose weight but I gained about 10 pounds. Fortunately all my clothes still fit which means I must be in good physical condition."

SeatoSea also included nine students, former students or staff at Redeemer University College, Hamilton. They included Carrie Van Dorp, 19, of Warton, Ont. She said: "It was wonderful to travel through the mountains in B.C. and see the majesty and grandeur there. Through the prairies the flax and granola were blooming at the same time. And in Ontario along Lake Superior we had a great day playing in the waves at Old Woman Bay."

Near the beginning of the ride the cyclists pushed through the Rockies, including climbing to the 4,533 foot summit of Rogers

Pass. They fought nasty headwinds across the Prairies, battled stiff climbs in Northern Ontario, survived heavy truck traffic north of Toronto, did photo shoots on Parliament Hill in Ottawa and managed to find a few hours to look around Quebec City. The last week of the ride was through New Brunswick and Nova Scotia with long distances covered and lots of rain.

But for much of the cross-Canada trip the sun shone day after day. Towards the end of the journey, Bill Wybenga, 58, of Brampton, Ont., led about a dozen riders on a side trip to Prince Edward Island. That covered 470 kms and included a visit to the home and Charlottetown church of Levina Luymes, 48, who was the first to register for the ride in July, 2004.

Of the 157 participating cyclists 104 were from Ontario and the rest mainly from Alberta and B.C. There were 19 riders in the 60 to 70-plus age bracket and 18 were under 20. The gender breakdown of participants was 102 men and 55 women. Scores of cyclists from local CRC churches along the route also joined the tour for one or two days.

While the cross-Canada ride was a daily test of endurance for many cyclists, others even managed to take time out for various reasons and later catch up with the main group. Marc Bomhof, 22, and his brother James, 19, of Lethbridge, AB, left the tour one Thursday to attend the wedding of their sister. On the following Monday, quite sleep deprived, they set off to catch the SeatoSea riders. They rode 309 km to Regina that day, cycling the Trans-Canada Highway at night, and the next day they cycled 235 km to rejoin the tour.

Michael Geertsema, 21, a student of Mallorytown, Ont., found time to see four chuckwagon races at the Calgary Stampede and Andrew Aukema, 19, of Chatham, Ont., spent four hours riding rollercoasters and visiting the waterpark at Canada's Wonderland near Toronto.

Pastor John VanSloten of New Hope CRC in Calgary spent six hours looking around Quebec City before riding back to camp. On the way dusk fell but VanSloten didn't see a big chunk of wood in his path and hit it. "I did a huge wobble and shook for five minutes," he said in an internet web blog posting. "One little slip and you're down."

The need for safe cycling was continually stressed and the subject of much prayer. Some of the most dangerous roads or those with poorly maintained shoulders – often necessary escape routes from passing vehicles – were in Saskatchewan and parts of Quebec and New Brunswick. On everyone's mind as the tour progressed were the relatively minor injuries that Henk Versteeg and Lisa Gysen received early on and the serious training injuries sustained by Elizabeth Woudsma near Kingston.

About 70 per cent of cyclists battled the flu at times but only a few felt ill enough to ride for a day in a support vehicle. Riders

said they were amazed at the reception they got from people across the country. Local CRC churches lined roads with banners and had people waving flags, but many strangers also gave heart-warming support. In Northern Ontario a motel opened its doors to storm-drenched riders while also handing out free coffee, tea and blankets and providing a dryer for soaked socks and shorts.

The ride raised \$1.1 million to help develop new CRC churches in Canada. It also aimed to boost unity within the denomination, to raise the CRC profile nationwide and help publicize the "Make Poverty History" campaign, an initiative that is supported by 50 countries. To participate, official riders had to raise \$1,000 a week in some cases, mainly from their own congregations. Along the way some riders received toonies from 8-year-olds, \$20 bills from strangers and even a cheque for \$100.

The cyclists handed out 12,000 SeatoSea cards that gave details about the ride and its purpose. The bikes ranged from road bikes with drop handlebars to hybrid types, a tandem and a recumbent trike. Cyclists suffered 556 flat tires during the ride; only three made the whole trip without a flat, Meghan Reitsma, a student midwife of Brantford, Ont., Sonya Thompson, an investment officer of Clinton, Ont., and Earl Wikkerink, a student, of Victoria, B.C.

Pastor Peter Slofstra, 54, and his wife Marja, 55, of Hope Fellowship CRC in Courtice, east of Oshawa, Ont., repaired five flats on their tandem alone on August 31. They were the only riders to go coast-to-coast on a tandem. Clarence Kooistra, 55, a forester from Vernon, B.C., did the same on an unusual recumbent bike, a three-wheel Tadpole Trike.

Slofstra said he feels the ride is one of the most positive things the CRC has ever done. "It is beyond what we imagined in terms of unifying all the churches and seeing young adults getting a really fresh idea of what it means to be a Christian and belong to a church."

The cyclists saw deer, bear, gophers, marmots and osprey. They jumped into nu-

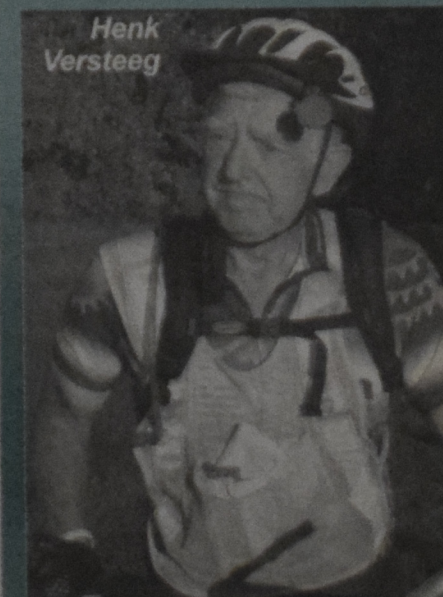
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**Peter Schuurman
and Elizabeth
Woudsma,
injured by fall**



**Alice
Witvoet**



**Henk
Versteeg**

Nature

A rural respite from the seasonal hustle and bustle

Lisa M. Petsche

Ah, Christmas in the country. For city dwellers, the notion holds a special charm. Wistful songs have even been written about it.

Our family gets a little taste of it when we travel to a 180-acre farm to harvest our own Christmas tree.

To prepare for this much anticipated, annual adventure, we don numerous layers of clothing, from thermal underwear to mittens and parkas. I gather the camera, along with pretzels, juice boxes, bubble gum and a handful of Christmas cassette tapes for the car ride, while my husband hunts for the saw out in our shed.

The 40-minute drive passes as quickly as is possible with a car full of excited kids. We enjoy singing along to carols and taking in the rural sights: houses with wraparound porches and gingerbread trim; large, festively decorated lawns; long, dirt driveways; roadside mailboxes; wood piles; barns and a variety of farm animals; unassuming town halls; and quaint, old churches.

Every other vehicle traveling towards us sports a tree on its roof or sticking out of the trunk.

The house with the two-storey snowman on the front lawn signals we're almost there. Stepping out of the car at last, we stretch and breathe deeply, inhaling the crisp, clean air and intoxicating evergreen aroma.

We have to hike for a bit to reach one of the designated, cut-your-own sections.



Along the way we pass through "activity alley," featuring sleighs for the kids to play in and wooden scenes with cut-outs for them to pose in, making for good photo opportunities. One route also takes customers across the "kissin' bridge," bearing a sign that warns if mom and dad don't kiss before crossing, the structure may collapse.

There are so many trees available – all full and beautifully shaped – you'd think choosing one would be a breeze. On the contrary, each family member locates a different, "perfect" specimen and makes a pitch for it – except for my husband, that is, who's happy to let the kids and me do the hunting and scrutinizing, his only request that the choice be finalized before his fingers and toes go numb.

The challenge is to avoid getting a tree that's too tall (so it doesn't require pruning) or too wide (so it doesn't block the living room entrance) – no easy feat given how deceptively small they all appear in the great outdoors.

A family photo is always taken in front of the adopted evergreen. (The kids enjoy comparing these pictures from year to year, to see how much they've grown and changed.) Then we all help to cut the tree and carry it to the service area, where customers queue up for assistance.

First, our spruce takes a spin on the shaking machine, to remove debris; the kids get a kick out of watching it vibrate maniacally. It then travels through the net baler before

we haul it off to our car in a surprisingly compact bundle.

Our next stop on the premises is the Pioneer Village Christmas Store: a huge barn full of charming holiday decorating items. The kids always bring their wallets, because merchandise is reasonably priced and different from the fare in city stores. They particularly enjoy perusing the large selection of nutcrackers, bells, angels and nativity scenes.

Finally, if the line's not too long, we buy French fries at the Lion's Club's food trailer and eat them in the shelter of the car.

On the way out, we pay for our evergreen and receive a complimentary wooden ornament (we're accumulating a nice collection). Driving down the long, winding exit lane, we admire the fields of "baby trees" that will be Christmas-ready in about a decade.

Part way home we stop for hot chocolate and, if we didn't end up buying fries, some donuts as well.

Our annual tree trek involves much more than simply getting a Christmas conifer, since there are easier ways to obtain one. During this often hectic, peak time of consumerism, our family's rural adventure is a refreshing respite – a special time to be together, have fun and appreciate the priceless beauty and simplicity of nature.

Lisa M. Petsche is a mother of three and a freelance writer specializing in family life.

A wind in the south has rain in her mouth

Maynard van der Galien

When I was a teenager I worked in construction for a (Dutch) man who would shake his head vigorously in disbelief whenever his employees talked about the weather and mentioned old weather lore sayings.

We could always have a little fun and get the boss going by talking about the coming weather. If the boss came by when we were eating lunch or having a coffee break, sometimes one of us outdoors farm-type lads would come up with a weather forecast.

He should have been smart and ignored our weather predictions.

The older employees were good at forecasting the weather. But no one could convince the boss that there is some truth to the weather lore sayings.

"We're in for some rain because the crickets were chirping in the house."

"The horses' tails were larger (hair standing erect)."

"There was a ring around the moon last night, means it going to rain."

"The cat was sneezing..."

"Onion skins are thick and tough, means the coming winter will be cold and rough."

"The sheep were standing in a huddle,

tomorrow we will have a puddle."

And so it went. The boss would shake his head in disgust. "I can't believe you guys," he would say. "How can you believe that kind of stuff?"

I could always tell when rain was coming when the front barn door blew shut when we were milking. It meant there was a change of wind. Wind from the north is a dry wind and no rain in sight.

But a wind from the south has rain in her mouth.

Rain from the east, wet two days at least.

"There's rain coming," I'd say, "the barn door blew shut this morning."

Maybe you are also skeptical about weather lore sayings. There are many things that transpire in nature that indicate weather changes. A ring around the sun or moon means there is moisture in the air. A red sky in the morning is a good sign of rain to come. A red sky in the evening means nice weather ahead.

I'm always observing the sky – especially first thing in the morning and in the evening.

Some years ago I was in New Brunswick walking on the tarmac to the airplane we

were boarding, and I noticed mares' tails in the sky. That's a sure sign of rain in a day or two. I casually remarked to the three people in our group that there's rain in sight.

They scoffed at me saying there isn't a dark cloud in the sky, so why would it rain? It was raining lightly when we landed in Montreal and pouring rain in Ottawa. My fellow travelers were impressed by my weather prediction.

Mares' tails are cirrus clouds, so called because they sometimes resemble the flowing tail of a horse in the wind. Mackerel scales are altocumulus clouds. They appear broken and scaly. Neither of these clouds will bring rain or snow. They do, however, precede an approaching storm front by a day or two.

Weather lore sayings on rain:

Rain before seven, quits before eleven. (I learned that from my father when I was a boy).

Rain from the east, wet two days at least. A sunshine shower, won't last half an hour.

If birds fly low, expect rain and a blow. Cats and dogs eat grass before a rain.

When chairs squeak, it's about rain they speak.

If salt is sticky and gains in weight, it will rain before too late.

If a circle forms 'round the moon, 'twill rain soon.

Pale moon rains; red moon blows. White moon neither rain nor snow.

When clouds look like black smoke, a wise man will put on his cloak.

When stones sweat in the afternoon, expect rain.

Spiders strengthening their webs indicates rain.

The higher the clouds, the finer the weather. Mares' tails and mackerel scales make lofty ships carry low sails.

And here's one to think about:

The moon and the weather
May change together;
But change of the moon
Does not change the weather.

Maynard van der Galien owns and operates the Old Towne Hall Restaurant and Tea Room in downtown Renfrew, Ont.



Christian living

Having a grateful heart

Richard Oostra

Are we entering an age of ingratitude?

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, ungrateful, unholy, without love, lovers of pleasure, having only a form of godliness. II Timothy 3

Families will be divided:

...father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

Luke 12:53

Why is it so important to love each other and be grateful?

It pleases God

When Jesus healed the ten lepers (Luke 17) only one returned to say thanks and Jesus took special note of that. Throughout the Bible we can read that God is very pleased when through prayer we offer him praise and thanksgiving. (Psalm 69:30,31)

It is an offering

He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me and he prepares the way

so that I may show him the salvation of God. Psalm 50:23

Throughout the psalms David says over and over again that we should thank the Lord. This attitude of thanksgiving made David the man after God's own heart.

It is an antidote for sin

Joseph was another man on whom God's blessing abundantly rested. From being sold as a slave by his very own brothers he rose to the ranks of being a ruler in Egypt. Even though ill-treated Joseph's life never revealed any bitterness, but throughout all his circumstances he revealed constant forgiveness with faith and gratitude to God. When being tempted by his master's wife he exclaimed:

How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?

Genesis 39

It connects us to God's heart

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.... Psalm 100:4

Many people who have difficulties in their prayer life fail to realize that the secret is to enter God's courts with thanksgiving, which is praise. When I was involved in Christian fundraising I learned the importance of saying thanks with the most amazing results. I tried to thank each special donor at least seven times. I would give them a call, send them a note, and whatever inspiration I would come up with. These donors felt honored and increased their giving as they found joy in this.

If human beings are so open to grateful-ness what do you think God is? The greatest appreciation I offer to these donors is to show them what their gifts had accomplished for the furtherance of Christ's kingdom. Now if I thanked earthlings seven times wouldn't it be more appropriate to thank God at least seventy times seven for all his blessings he gives us daily?

It is the fruit of our lips

Always give thanks to the Father for everything.... Ephesians 5:20

Throughout the scriptures we are encouraged to use the members of our body to glorify God. How much more so should we do this with our lips? The foremost thing we should do is to thank God in conversation and prayer for the gift of his Son. Then we have so many other blessings. Our homes, freedom, country, spouses, children, health and this list could go on. Giving thanks to God increases our love and appreciation. Isn't interesting that when the bible speaks of spiritual decay in the latter days it also says that the love of many will grow cold.

It increases your health

A grateful spirit energizes your body and increases your health. Thankful people are happier people, more pleasant and fun to as-

The goodness and severity of God

The early morning light creeps across the sky, transforming it from flannel gray to a mere overcast white. A dozen or so mourning doves huddle in the naked branches of the maple trees nearest the feeder. Remnants of last summer's corn crop poke through the first thin blanket of snow. My living room window is a picture frame to the ever-changing seasons, each one beautiful in its own right.



I sip my coffee and contemplate the seasons as a metaphor of redemption history. In a global sense there is spring,

with the smell of a newly created world; summer in all its fullness, reminiscent of Eden's glory; autumn, when nature vividly displays the inevitable change and foreshadows death and decay; and winter – when all the world (as I know it) appears to be asleep. But really, a miracle is in progress. Under the frozen surface God works his plan of regeneration.

On a personal level, I think of how my life moves through its own seasons, well beyond any semblance of control I may dream of having. Each phase brings its own joys as well as challenges. Often it's the struggles that propel me through life, like the wind in my sails, always pushing me back to my maker and his mercy day after day. I look to him to somehow make sense of it all, knowing in my heart that both weal and woe come from his hand and together constitute the "good and perfect" gifts his word describes.

For now it's time to celebrate Christmas. I decorate the house with colored lights and greenery. I bake goodies and cook special meals and send off letters to long-lost friends. Church services focus on the promised child of Isaiah 9. God's people commemorate the first advent of Christ, even as we await his second coming. The anticipation is palpable.

How lovely to think of the little baby, born to a virgin that night long ago in Bethlehem. I frequently overlook the fact that he was there, in a stable, in the midst of the dust and flies and livestock, because no one would afford his mother the dignity of a room, even in her condition. And I'd just as soon not con-

sociate with. A positive attitude sheds light upon the shadows we all experience in life. It strengthens our faith and enhances our testimony. Praise stimulates laughter and frightens the forces of darkness. Living in these latter days we see a world of depression, insomnia and fear, but those who radiate confidence and trust in the Lord,

...will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever." Daniel 12:13

It puts a melody in one's heart

...sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father....

Ephesians 5:19,20

David was not only a great musician but also a psalm writer. How can a man who was haunted by the king he respected, was persecuted and rejected by his own people, and even having fallen into sin still be in touch with God? His heart and his lips never ceased to give praise to God, even in spite of his own failures.

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

sider the idea that beyond that stable, an evil king ordered the wholesale slaughter of countless babies because of his jealousy and lust for power. The angels split the night sky with the triumphant announcement of the Savior's birth. Not long after, the weeping of childless mothers echoed from the Judean hills.

Mary's boy survived Herod's holocaust. He grew in "wisdom and stature." His parents knew all along that there was something very unusual about their son, but he continued to surprise them. Like the time they lost track of him during the Passover Feast. Where did they find him? In the synagogue – amazing the scholars. "Where else would I be?" he said.

He took on his father's trade, becoming a carpenter, skilled with tools and wood. All the while he was waiting to take on his Father's business – the work of saving souls from hell's destruction.

He chose twelve ordinary men for extraordinary service, then spent all his time with society's riff-raff, forsaking the company of the elite to rub elbows with tax collectors and sinners. He healed the sick, raised the dead and consistently preached God's message to the masses. He knew hunger, thirst and loneliness, but kept moving obediently through the seasons of his tragically short life, until finally his goodness brought him to the severity of the cross.

The grieving black sky of Good Friday contrasted starkly with the glorious light of Easter morning. Once more he walked the earth, this time in a resurrected body, and then one day he left for heaven with the promise that he would come back for us.

Meanwhile we wait here in the cold of winter or the heat of summer, the storms or sunshine of this life. And at just the right time, not a moment sooner, Christ will return to put it all into perspective for us. Finally, when we stand face to face with our creator we will understand – truly comprehend – the goodness and severity of God.



Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ont. Her email hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com

It calms the storms of life

Job was a prosperous man and a God fearing believer. So Satan comes to God and asks for permission to test Job. This brought calamities into Job's life. He lost his family and all his wealth. Job had friends who sympathized with him and they could not comprehend that he was not bitter towards God. So they encouraged him to stop being so God-fearing considering the situation he was in. It was then that Job uttered his famous words of:

Can we expect only good things from God and not the bad?

And then he revealed his attitude that brought him through his trials:

Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him. Job 13:15

Job never lost his faith and God was proud of him and gave Job more back than he ever possessed. May this attitude of praise and gratefulness sustain us too through the storms of life.

Women

Blessed are you among women



Vicki's mother and sister

Vicky Van Andel

One day Mary, the mother of Jesus, received a visit from an angel. The angel told her the awesome news that she was going to become the mother of the Son of God. The angel also told her that her cousin Elizabeth was pregnant. This was an amazing thing because Elizabeth was older and had been barren during her fertile years.

When Mary heard this she was full of awe and wonder. She decided to visit her cousin Elizabeth to talk with her about the things she had heard. So she hurried to a town on the hillside of Judea where Elizabeth lived. When they met, Mary greeted her with these words: "Blessed are you among women." And, so the Bible states, immediately the child within Elizabeth "leapt in her womb."

This is a touching story about a close friendship between two women. The women are of very different ages. They are drawn together because of very unusual circumstances, although it appears they are cousins as well. Both women are chosen by God to become pregnant in miraculous ways and to bear very special children. This makes their friendship bond unique.

The story is also fascinating because it describes a very delicate detail. Upon Mary's greeting, the child within Elizabeth leaps (for joy?) in her womb. What an extraordinary note, especially so because the Bible is written by men. How do they know this? I wonder if Elizabeth made a note of it and later told them.

It is very remarkable too to note that the greeting and the leaping happen at the same time. Maybe it was one more divine loop God threw at these unsuspecting women. I have fun speculating a bit here and there on what it may have been like for the central women in the salvation story to carry out God's amazing plan. It could not have been easy for them. The Christmas story comes alive to me as I try to pry a little deeper into the lives of the women who facilitated its coming about. I try to visualize this friendship to get a real life picture of how Mary and Elizabeth tried to support each other during this time and struggled

to figure out the full meaning of what must have been a very baffling situation.

So Christmas and friendships go together. To stretch this thought I am sharing a few more scripture examples of women in the Bible who have close relationships. Elaine Storkey in one of the chapters in her book *Mary's Story, Mary's Song* offers a brief overview of several biblical friendships between women. I am quoting directly from her writing:

"Once we have eyes to see these stories (about women and their relationships), they tumble out of history and live again in the ever-freshness of God's Word. We read fascinating stories: of the midwives in Exodus who refused the orders of Pharaoh to abort the Israelite babies, because they knew what childbirth meant to those in labor pangs; of Miriam and her mother, together protecting the child in the first Moses basket in the bulrushes, listening to each other's fears and learning wisdom and quick thinking from each other; of Ruth and Naomi, committed passionately to each other, staying firm in their love and allegiance, and bringing blessings to the whole of Israel. Or we can turn to the women in the New Testament who follow the same tradition. We can listen to the lives of Mary and Martha, those sisters who loved each other and the Christ who raised their brother from the dead. We can learn of Susanna and Joanna who supported Jesus financially, traveling with him on that final journey, and making a gloriously abortive trip to anoint his body on the resurrection day. We can ponder over Euodia and Syntyche, those committed women leaders in the early Church who in spite of all their loyalty and hard work for the Gospel, still struggled to be reconciled after a difficult dispute. God has populated the Scriptures with faithful loving women who are committed to be servants of each other and of God. The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth recalls them all and touches into the depths of women's experiences throughout the ages." (p.25, 26)

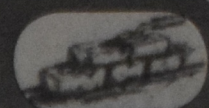
Storkey motivates me to read up on, and perhaps take time to study, the stories of women's friendships in the Bible. I have not heard of Euodia and Syntyche. Storkey also inspires me to honor the women friends I have in my own life more consciously. Therefore I take a moment to name the women in my life who have made a difference this past year.

Joyce. She participated in the Sea to Sea bike ride across Canada this summer. It was a bike ride organized to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Joyce joined the cross country team in Guelph, Ontario, and finished with them in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

In her journal she describes the trip. She talks about her

BuildingTrust

Vicky Van Andel Ed.



feelings of excitement and anticipation as she planned and trained for the ride months ahead of time. She describes the thrill of stepping on her bike every morning, wondering what the new day would bring, and of the courage and determination it took to navigate long hills and challenging roads. She tells of her awe of the beauty of the rising sun, the wild flowers along the way, the fields of ripening grain and wide green pastures. How grateful she was for the good food prepared by the many supporters who faithfully came out to cheer the team on.

Joyce is a woman of strength and determination, and has the ability to set goals and accomplish them. She stretches her own boundaries and succeeds. She does it in quiet humility and with love for others, all the while testifying of the glory of God.



Julie is a generous, kind, bright and energetic stay-at-home (in her own words) mom raising a family with four young children. She enjoys life, motherhood, family and friends. Her quiet wisdom and overt appreciation of her blessings inspire others. Adie quietly listens to long conversations about life's complexities. Her gentle prodding unmasks new possibilities. Virginia suddenly left to go to heaven or, in her own words "crossed the river." She blankets the people who mourn her with a warm glow of her spirit. Judy, Elly, Ellen, Louisa, Karin, Gerda, Marie, Karen. The group of the women's group I belong to. Oprah. So many women. Leah, a little girl. Thank you.



I also honor the many women around the world who live in countries such as Afghanistan, India, Iraq, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan and other places where women struggle for their rights. I acknowledge homeless women in inner cities. Let's offer a hand and reach out to each other and form a circle of friends around the world and include Elizabeth and Mary and all women from the past and greet each other with the words of Mary, "Blessed are you among women."

Vicky Van Andel is the editor of this column. Anyone who would like to contribute to this column is invited to contact her via fax at 1-780-473-0970, or e-mail at: vickyv@telus.net

Islam ..continued from p.11

It is also a denial of the history of Islamic oppression of the Infidels during its 1400 years' existence, of which the historical record is clear and undeniable.

We are asked to turn a blind eye to the reality that right now in Muslim-controlled or Muslim-infiltrated countries, stretching all the way from Northern Africa to the Far East, Christians, Buddhists, Jews, and others, including moderate Muslims, are murdered in the name of Allah.

The same can be said about the fact that extremist Muslims are preaching a message of hatred in many western countries, driven by the Islamic notion of a worldwide caliphate.

It seems to me that the sponsors of our get-acquainted

meeting at this Toronto mosque were trying to have it both ways. They want to represent themselves as part of the worldwide, Koran-believing religionists with a history that spans nearly one-and-a-half millennia.

At the same time, they present themselves as if they appeared on the current scene fresh as a newborn baby. But in doing so, they are not telling us the whole story, or they are trying to tell us that we should just close our eyes to an ugly reality. We should not oblige.

None of this is intended to accuse all Muslims of being terrorists. We should welcome the many moderate Muslims who want to live in peace with the rest of us. But we are not helped by those who want to give us the hand of friendship while trying to redefine the Christian faith and refusing to

face down their co-religionists who destroy and kill in the name of their religion. After all, real friendship begins with telling the truth.

* All quotations from the speech by Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi are taken from his printed booklet entitled, *Jesus: A Prophet of Islam*. It contains a footnote that states: *The Mahdi, according to the Shi'a Muslims, is the Twelfth Imam and successor of the Prophet Muhammad; he was born in the year 255 of the Islamic era and is presently in Occultation. He also has been preserved by God and will appear before the end of this world.*

Harry Antonides
hantonides@sympatico.ca

Wheels and skates



...continued from p. 13

merous rivers and lakes to cool off. Most survived safety hazards that included running over nuts, bolts, wire, 2 x 4 lumber, glass, wire, potholes, loose gravel and even a rattlesnake.

Once back home most participants opted to take a break from cycling for a while and almost two months after returning to Acton, Ont., Al Leferink, a shipper-receiver, had yet to unpack his bike from its shipping box. Frank Westerhof, however, was back into the saddle fairly quickly, riding to work to give a helping hand to his son. George Vanderkuur, 62, a school principal from Pickering, Ont., who is an experienced cyclist and did the whole route, said that initially he never thought Versteeg and Westerhof would have a chance of completing the journey, but in the end they came through in spades.

John De Jong, 49, a farmer from Chesterville in Eastern Ontario, handed over his farm for to his two sons for two years as part of his decision to join the ride. They were given power of attorney to do the job to see if they wanted to buy the farm and make it a full-time career. Usually "Farmer John" was first out of the campsite each day, as for years he's been used to be getting up at 4:30 a.m. And he was one of the first to take the plunge into Halifax Harbour with his bike once marathon ride finished.

"I did it once but never again," he said. "The hardest part was not seeing my family for weeks – although they came to see me at Tobermory and in Halifax."

Jennifer Aasman, a teacher from Fort McMurray, Alberta, cycled from Regina in memory of her father, an avid cyclist who suffered a heart attack more than a decade ago and died while riding.

John Muller, a farmer from Cranford, Alberta, said his main reason for riding was to be an example to his children.

Colleen Vissia, 32, a mental health worker from Nanaimo, B.C. said the special celebration services along the way were awesome and she was also impressed at the support given by local communities. "I thought that physically it would have been a lot tougher. The power of prayer was felt in a major way on the trip."

In fact, most cyclists said that the chore of pitching their tents each night and packing them up early next day was more harrowing than the physical challenge of the ride. They all ate well and there was usually an over-supply of food.

Nearly 40 volunteers from across the country traveled in vehicles as support crew. The cyclists camped at parks, community centres and in school grounds. Tents and personal gear were transported in a tractor trailer, and a second housed a fully-equipped kitchen, but many meals enroute were supplied by CRC churches. At overnight stops in Ontario members of

some churches gave free services such as haircuts, pedicures and massages.

Two extraordinary efforts in support of the ride were made by two CRC members from Ontario who for different reasons were unable to go with the group.

• Ken Morrow, 18, of Willowdale in Toronto is confined to a wheelchair following a skateboard injury he suffered two years ago. However, he was reported as being well on the way to doing 7,000 km – the distance covered in the tour – on a special stationary bike in his home.

• Bill Klyn-Hesselink, 80, of Owen Sound, Ont., knew the trip would be too much for him. Instead, he devised his own tour and in May and June biked 2,000 km on various day trips around Georgian Bay and the shores of Lake Huron. He started biking eight years ago as rehabilitation for knee replacement surgery.

A special trip highlight during the SeatoSea tour was at Picture Butte, Alberta, where riders gathered in the tiny white building that was the first CRC church in Canada and is now part of a museum. Tania Vronenhoven, 26, a teacher from Ayr, Ont., stepped up to play the organ in a spontaneous service that saw old hymns sung such as "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

Marti du Plessis, 46, of Georgetown, Ont., one of the strongest riders, who came to Canada from South Africa in 2003, said the vision of the SeatoSea ride gripped her heart. "Outreach to unchurched people is a passion for me," she said. "There is such a lot of work to be done for God here in Canada. There's such a tremendous lot of wonderful people who don't know the Lord Jesus." Du Plessis joined the trip in Tobermory, Ont., and is a member of an elite Toronto cycling group, the Randonneurs. Her husband, Rev. Dr. Kobi du Plessis, was installed as minister at Bethel CRC in Newmarket, Ont., on Sept. 18 and Marti got the word that he'd been approved as pastor when the ride reached Ottawa.

A commemorative video of the cross-Canada SeatoSea ride is being produced on DVD at \$24.99 and half the proceeds will go to injured cyclist Elizabeth Woudsma and her family. For information call 905-304-4817 or go to www.SeatoSea.org

Brian Dexter is a freelance writer and a member of the Georgetown Christian Reformed Church. He rode with the SeatoSea group from Guelph to Woodbridge, also visited riders at Trenton and has since kept in touch with several cyclists. Linda Marissen, a ride support volunteer of Rockwood, Ont., also contributed to this article. Pictured on the front page is Frank Westerhof. Harold de Kleer of Castleton, Ont., supplied pictures of the ride finale in Halifax and of Pastor Peter Schuurman shaking hands with Elizabeth Woudsma.

Worship – featuring Don Cherry

My window seat

Mendelt Hoekstra



I recently read an article that claimed 34 percent of North Americans worship on a semi-regular basis and only 17 percent on a regular basis.

Although the article did not define worship, a difficult word to define, I thought about the various ways North Americans worship. I presume that the article was speaking about sitting in a church pew, but for many North Americans worship begins on Saturday night (or afternoon depending on your time zone) and usually is supported by a couch not a pew. It usually starts with one twenty minute period, a Coaches Corner with the ever popular Don Cherry, continues with two more twenty minute periods and can even include a full west coast game. You could potentially "worship" for 6 hours on Saturday before a Sunday church service even starts.

But Sunday morning is reserved for leaving the couch for a few hours; enough time to squeeze in a church service, a coffee and lunch. Then many return to the couch for football. Each and every Sunday during the National Football League (NFL) season, one can watch football games from 1:00 – 4:00 p.m., 4:00 – 7:00 p.m., and 8:30 – 12:30 p.m. (All hours in EST). That is 9 hours of football, excluding the pre-game shows that begin at 9:00 a.m.

If you are uncomfortable with the notion that worship comes in the form of hockey, as I am, I did some research to look at the numbers. According to the Nielsen Ratings, the November 26th, 2005 game on CBC between the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Montreal Canadiens (one of the more popular and historic hockey rivalries) that went into overtime drew 1.94 million viewers in Canada. (It ranked 11th for that week, C.S.I.' ranking number one.) The show began with a series of violent shots of severe body checks, great goals and even fist fights with a version of Elton John's song "Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting" to ratchet up the excitement. There were camera shots of fans in the stands standing, cheering, shouting – and of course drinking beer. In the first intermission of the game, Don Cherry repeated his mantra that NHL hockey needs to keep fighting in the game because the fans love it.

In the same way people flock to see a train wreck, slow down in traffic to study a car crash, Cherry is correct; people are attracted to a fight.

The second game on CBC on November 26 was the match between the Vancouver Canucks and the Phoenix Coyotes. According to the Nielsen ratings, this game drew 1.21 million viewers. In the United States, the three most popular NFL games that same weekend drew an audience of 18.52, 17.65 and 9.99 million viewers.

I have had the opportunity to attend many NHL hockey games as well as a handful of NFL football games. People attend these games to find entertainment, passion, a good story and meaning. I have also had the opportunity to attend thousands of church services. People attend these services to find entertainment, passion, a good story and meaning.

There are some similarities between professional sports games and church services.

Typical Church Service	Typical professional sports event
Begins with a type of Call to Worship	Begins with one or two National Anthems
Usually collects an offering	The last time I went to the Air Canada Centre (Toronto), two beers cost 18 dollars.
Most church services have a message or sermon.	Even at the arenas, people flock to the television screen to watch Don Cherry.
There is always singing in church.	Many teams have their own fight song or sing a collective song such as Stompin' Tom Connors <i>Good ole' Hockey Game</i>
All services have benediction or closing	After the game the highlights of the games are shown as well as the upcoming games

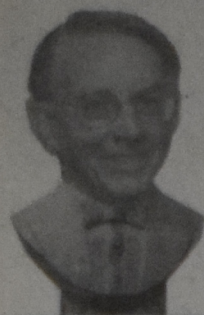
There are obvious differences between worshipping a game and true worship in church. For one, not many athletes point the way to eternal life and not many pastors or ministers have a salary of over one million dollars. The average player salary in the NHL is 1.81 million dollars US, and the average salary in the NFL is 1.25 million dollars US.

Allow me to recount the numbers: 6 hours for hockey, 2 hours for church and 9 hours for football equates to 17 hours of "worship" for a North American weekend. Since a week has 168 hours, 17 hours is approximately ten percent. Remember, this is only speaking of hockey and football. We've made no mention of soap operas, professional wrestling entertainment, chocolate, video games, money, fashion magazines, the internet, reality shows, shopping, sugar....

So the question is: What do we worship?

Mendelt D. Hoekstra is the founder and director of the Music Therapy program at Bethesda, an organization owned and operated by the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Ontario, that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives in Vineland, ON with Marisa and their two children.

Opinion



Welcome
to my
Pedestal

Bert Witvoet

In the bleak, bleak winter of elections

Bert Witvoet

After six years of absence from the pages of Christian Courier, Bert Witvoet has decided to throw his hat into the ring again. He says: "By now, CC readers will almost have forgotten about my years of editorship, and I can take my place as a columnist without too much baggage. For the past six years, I have been quite busy with various responsibilities (I still edit the Christian Educators Journal), but now that I am no

longer in council at our church, I find myself freed up to do some more writing again. I have no idea what kind of writing I will do, except to say that it will be a mixture of personal reflection and social comment."

Many years ago in the Vanguard, Bert used to write under the rubric "Welcome to my perch." A perch sounds a bit fragile and shaky. After all these years, I think he deserves something more stable, something with more stature. How about "Welcome to my pedestal"? After all, age merits a certain degree of veneration.

But perhaps that brings dangers. Think of what happened to Conrad Black after he was elevated to a lordship....

At any rate, welcome back to CC – whether perch or pedestal or pulpit, may your pen be pointed and your points be penetrating and pungent (there – that exhausts my stock of p-words).

HdN

Canadians are going to the polls on January 23, 2006. By the time you read this column, much of the electioneering may have already taken place. If none of the parties and their leaders have made a major mistake, the

outcome may not be all that different from what it was at the time of the dissolution of Parliament, November 28. It most certainly will be a minority government of either the Liberal or Conservative kind, barring any "catastrophic" development. Neither one of the outcomes offers much hope.

A Liberal minority government makes the whole effort of having an election futile and will leave the deep impression that lack of integrity is not an important issue for many Canadians, especially in Ontario. It will also mean that the Liberals will once more need the NDP to stay in power, which in itself is somewhat of an unholy alliance.

A Conservative minority government will not be very productive because the Conservatives have no allies in Parliament. The Canadian political scene is left of centre, certainly when it comes to social policies. The Bloc and the NDP are left leaning when it comes to both social and economic policies. The Liberals used to be conservative economically, but they have become spend-thrifts of late, and they are certainly left of centre when it comes to social policies. This leaves the Conservatives a bit of room to manoeuvre in the area of economics (liberals might come on board in some cases) but socially, there is little for them to achieve. They will not be able to reverse previous decisions regarding same-sex marriage and abortion, for example.

Lest we become too cynical about politics, we must remember that the character of our nation has been shaped by many forces other than political ones. The government is not solely responsible for the state of our nation. The moral fabric of Canada has been negatively influenced by its educational institutions, the news media, the entertainment industry, the cultural elite, even some churches. The secularization of all public institutions and the constant emphasis on economic growth has thinned out the moral fibre of our society. Most Canadians are suspicious of those who want to limit the role of the state and to restrict personal freedoms

through "pro-life" and "pro-family" forms of legislation.

Although none of the four major political parties represent my beliefs, I intend to vote Conservative in the upcoming election. That's because I care about the moral character of Canada, and because I do believe that the drift towards personal autonomy and the destruction of spiritual and moral values must be kept in check. The greatest danger to the health of our nation is not the weaknesses in our public health system or social welfare net, but the lack of restraints socially and economically that are necessary for moral and spiritual growth and the unwillingness to pursue justice and mercy.

I know, as a nation we need more than restraint. We need the shalom and freedom that comes from thankful and obedient living before the face of God. We need parents who care and who are willing to discipline lovingly. We need models in people who live sacrificial lives. We need neighborhoods that encourage community and allow children and young people to feel safe. We need generosity when we are confronted with the plight of the poor. But part of the problem of modern living is the lack of structure and the lack of respect for boundaries. How can a people flourish if it doesn't respect moral and ethical boundaries?

I remember talking to a Muslim leader, a moderate imam from Niagara Falls, a few years ago. He told me that, when he first came to Canada about 50 years ago, he was enthusiastic about the fabric of Canadian society. According to him, Canada was more Muslim than many other so-called Muslim countries. There was respect for law and authority, and there was a strong emphasis on a good moral life style (divorces were few, adultery was frowned upon, overt sexual images were not allowed on the newsstands and pornography was illegal). People lived frugally and honorably (for the most part), workers were loyal to companies and companies were loyal to workers. A pervasive sense of godliness shone through

the public expressions of society. He knew that he was dealing with expressions of the Christian religion, but that did not bother him. He welcomed it. Today, he is appalled at what has happened to Canadian society. And many Muslims with him now see the Western way of life as a corrupt and immoral environment for young persons of all persuasions to grow up in.

This is the Canada we live in, and it is in this setting that we have to make political choices. To be a social conservative today can mean that you want to restore a respect for law and God-given institutions. It does not necessarily mean that you buy into the "liberalism" that almost all parties buy into.

When it comes to the three main parties (I leave out the Bloc because it has nothing to offer to people outside of Quebec), I see some integrity in the NDP and the Conservatives, maybe because they are not in power. I see too strong a reliance on socialistic and adversarial principles in the NDP. I see too much power opportunism and too little of principle in the Liberal party. I see too much of a business approach to the economy in the Conservative Party. All of them are too pragmatic. I don't see enough courage of conviction in any of them. As for the Christian Heritage Party, it reduces morality to pro-life issues and is not critical enough of economic immorality.

The overall picture for someone like me is quite bleak, actually, were it not for the fact that I seek and pray for another kingdom, which is coming for sure. I expect that in that kingdom there will be no electioneering and grandstanding, and, instead of resorting to democratic voting, we can resolve all issues through perfect consensus.

In the meantime, I make my choice hesitantly and imperfectly without too much allegiance to any party. And if, Lord, you want to come before January 23, 2006, that will be quite alright with me.

A broken beauty....continued from page 10

honoring "beautiful" artistry a bad name. And it would be a mistake, I think, to try to recover a tradition of metaphysical Beauty comparable to the way the PreRaphaelite Brotherhood attempted, because such a move would distance artists from the societal turmoil where they are needed.

"Beauty" is a weasel-word. Maritain, Schapiro and Fuglie claim that the perfection, coherence and unity of form and content belonging to beauty does not mean the style of "academic classicism" (69) – there are different kinds of beauty (71)! And Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now the new pope Benedict XVI) wrote in the *L'Osservatore Romano* (November 6, 2002) about "the Beauty and the Truth of Christ" that "a purely harmonious concept of beauty is not enough" (par. 13). Yet Ratzinger still

maintained, echoing Plato – and would be applauded by Fuglie – that beauty wounds a man and "lifts him upward towards the transcendent" (par.5).

I am heartened by good artists who weave their christian faith naturally, unostentatiously, into their artistry, since the awareness that there is more to things than meets the eye or occurs to those able to think is valuable grist for wisdom. And my whole consciousness resonates with Bruce Herman's note in the "Foreword" about "the surprising beauty found in moments of suffering or loss or brokenness" (x) – although my word would be "grace" rather than "beauty."

But the metaphysics of Beauty which a Sacramentalist Aesthetics adopts, prejudices

artistry to have to be geared toward the *visio dei*, to have us creatures be transcending our nature toward God, experiencing an epiphany of the Transcendent.

Such a framework goes wrong, I think, on two counts: (1) it assumes a philosophical ontology that admits a nondescript "spirituality" and a "God-in-general" with a mediator other than Jesus Christ; and (2) it lays a burden on artists to produce art which arrives at or imports a transcendent "sacredness" somehow.

Artistry in God's world, understood from the Reformational biblical faith-thought tradition which informs my outlook, is not meant to be a striving to transcend our human place into God's heavenly presence, but is conceived to be a thanking God for the Lord's Spirit presence here on earth,

thanking with the gift of being imaginatively alive with hope in God's messed up world.

Beyond that, as Hans Rookmaaker said, "Art needs no justification" (*Complete Works* [Carlisle: Piquant, 2002] 4:315-349). To burden art with a beauty apologetics seems to me to be somewhat like dressing up artists in Saul's heavy armor to fight the Philistines of TAW and mediocrity. It makes more biblical sense, I think, to understand artistry in a diaconal framework and support artists whose artistic calling and labor show a perky or empathetic care for the neighbor, while we onlookers keep our slingshot of love ready in the back pocket.

Calvin Seerveld Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, emeritus

Classifieds

December Advocate items

The December Advocate is a publication of the CRC Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (You can subscribe to the newsletter at: <http://www.crcjustice.org/>)

Princeton seminary professor applauds war and peace report

Princeton Theological Seminary professor Max L. Stackhouse had fine words for the recently released CRC synodical report on war and peace. In an email to his Christian Social Ethics class, Dr. Stackhouse called the report "absolutely the best statement of the Reformed traditions treatment of these issues in view of the contemporary debates over Iraq, etc., that I have seen." The professor encouraged students to save the report "for future reference when and if you are called upon to preach or teach on these matters."

Canada Votes 2006 – What is at stake?

Mike Hogeterp

After 17 months of wild Parliamentary shenanigans Canada faces a winter election campaign: so besides the carolers this Christmas we can expect campaigners on our door steps. The temptation might be to say bah humbug and ignore the election entirely. But before you ignore the door let's consider this: we are bound to hear earnest debate about restoring public trust – a good thing! Our challenge during this campaign is to keep the focus on promises made by our country (both citizens and government) – promises to care for our neighbors and communities both here and around the world. As a Christian advocate I have a particular per-

spective on politics – as you trudge through the snow to the polls let me share a few thoughts on promises made that could or should come up in this election.

Government Ethics: The sponsorship fiasco has led to some red faces and a lot of pious rhetoric about integrity on all sides. The sad fact is that this scandal has deepened public cynicism – and the sniping and blame game isn't helping any. Integrity might be better demonstrated in what leaders are committed to doing, rather than in the tiring game of pointing out the flaws of their opponents.

Health Care: Canadians are a little smug about our health care system – it is considered a cornerstone of social policy and a shining example of social justice. But the reality is the system is under pressure. Expect the parties to proclaim their loyalty to a public medical system – encourage them to explain how they'd make the system sustainable.

Budget Policy: This is hardly the stuff of yuletide joy! But it is a key part of justice and public trust. The fiscal deficit has been tackled and has led to healthy budget surpluses. Now the talk in many parties is about tax cuts – to give us back our money. But budget deficits were beaten by making deep cuts that affected national promises to end child poverty and commitments made to affordable housing. Check out for info on housing and homelessness issues. Before tax cuts, let's make sure attention is paid to social development deficits.

International Policy: Canadians like to consider themselves leaders in international

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affairs. We joined with all the nations of the world in a promise to cut poverty in half by 2015 (). We helped to develop the responsibility to protect doctrine – a plan to say never again to tragedies like Rwanda. Yet our commitment to foreign aid does not meet the international standard (developed in Canada) of 0.7 percent Gross National Income; and our promises to assist peace building in Darfur,

Sudan are far behind schedule. Encourage leaders to be true to these critical promises – for the sake of life.

Mike Hogeterp represents the Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG), a committee of the CRC in Canada. Contact him at hogeterp@crcna.ca, or check out CCG online: www.crcna.org/ccg

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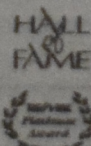
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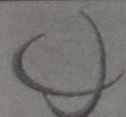
Classified Rates	Anniversary	Obituary
<p>DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION <i>Christian Courier</i> is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.</p> <p>RATES (GST added to all rates listed) All personal and family announcements: rose@christiancourier.ca \$7.00 per square inch Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: ads@christiancourier.ca \$8.00 per square inch</p> <p>PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of \$25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged P.I., but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.</p> <p>PERSONAL ADS <i>Christian Courier</i> would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. The cost to set up a personal file under a unique file number is \$25. Ads requesting correspondence with this file are run at \$16 P.I. per insertion. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened.</p> <p>NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS We offer a \$25 one-year subscription to couples whose wedding is announced in <i>Christian Courier</i> and to parents who announce a child's birth in our paper. If you want to take advantage of this offer, please let us know when placing your ad.</p> <p>SUBMITTING YOUR AD: <i>Christian Courier</i> 1 Hiscott St St Catharines ON L2R 1C7 fax: 905-682-8313 e-mail: see above</p> <p>OTHER INFORMATION: <i>Christian Courier</i> reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style. Please provide us with clear copy. <i>Christian Courier</i> is not responsible for any errors due to hand written or phoned-in advertisements.</p>	<p>The family of WIEBE AND HENNIE WAGENAAR</p> <p>thank God the he has blessed our parents and grandparents with 50 years of marriage on December 23, 2005.</p> <p>Friends and acquaintances are welcome to an Open House on December 17, 2005 at Emmanuel CRC in Calgary from 2-4 p.m.</p> <p>Love and congratulations from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren</p> <p>Address: 416 - 38 ST SW, Calgary AB T3C 1T1</p> <hr/> <p>WE'RE SORRY!</p> <p>Our apologies to our readers for the missing headlines and boxes on the last page of the November 21 issue. Everything that was in color disappeared from the page during the printing process.</p> <p>The error was not discovered until after the paper had been delivered. Our printer offered to reprint the entire issue, but we opted to save paper and resources and send out the paper without the headlines.</p> <p>We hope you concur with our decision and forgive our publisher, Harry der Nederlanden, editor</p>	<p>January 26, 1932 HILDA (Hiltje) WIELEMAKER (nee Overdijk) October 7, 2005</p> <p><i>Rejoice in the LORD always. Philippians 4:4-7</i></p> <p>Predeceased by her husband Anthony Wielemaker her children, grandchildren & great-grandchildren Marilyn & Gord Vreugdenhil Curtis & Mary Beth, David & Sarah (Joshua, Noah), Mark Laura & Jack Roeleveld James, Joel, Blair, Carl Rena & Paul Hoomweg Nicholas & Stephanie, Timothy, Maria, Benjamin Ken & Eleanor Wielemaker Monique, Anthony, Natalie, Leana Beverly & Martin Boekke Daniel, Rachel, Kenneth Anthony & Janet Wielemaker</p> <p>Dear sister of Marijke Haaima, Dirk Overdijk, <i>The Netherlands</i> Rena Glass, <i>Brampton</i> & John Overdijk, <i>New Liskerd</i></p> <p>A service of remembrance was held at Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church in Trenton on October 11, 2005</p> <p>Correspondence: c/o Marilyn Vreugdenhil, RR#1 Frankford ON K0K 2C0</p> <hr/> <p>For Rent</p> <div data-bbox="1087 1078 1542 1286"> <p>ST. CATHARINES — Room for rent in house. Utilities included. Share cost of sat/net/phone. On bus route and close to downtown. \$400 /mo. Available immediately. Call Darryl at 905-380-7362</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1542 1078 2051 1286"> <p>BEAMSVILLE — 3 BEDROOM (main floor) \$1150 a month. Quiet subdivision, near QEW. Utilities, central air and use of washer + dryer included. No pets/smoking. Available immediately. Call Jacob at 905-563-6995 after 6 p.m</p> </div>
<p>Personals</p> <p>Single woman in late 20's from Southwestern Ontario would like to correspond/meet a Christian man. Reply to File #2749 c/o <i>Christian Courier</i> 1 Hiscott St St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7</p>	<p>Books available</p> <p>Build your Neo-Kuyperian library DUTCH BOOKS 50-60 books — Kuyper, Bavinck, K. Dyk, DeGraaf, Schilder Call 416-622-0282 (Toronto area)</p>	<p>HELP TO MAKE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION ACCESSIBLE FOR EVERYONE</p> <p><i>The Christian Economic Assistance Foundation (CEAF) believes that every Ontario family is entitled to give their children a Christian day-school education in accordance with their faith.</i></p> <p>CEAF was founded in 1972 to help needy families pay for Christian education without undergoing humiliating procedures.</p> <p>The goal is to provide assistance to any Christian school supporter, providing the school is a member of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools and participates in CEAF.</p> <p>The program allows support of up to \$2,500 per child and is designed to encourage contributions from the family itself.</p>
<p>For Sale</p> <p>Lowrey Theatre Organ — Model C300 25 note pedal board \$1000 firm Phone: 613-966-0388</p> <p><i>Not exactly as shown</i></p>	<p>Bed & Breakfast 'Nijenstein'</p> <p>Situated just south of Utrecht in a beautiful location, within a short drive's distance from the major cities.</p> <p>The actual accomodation is a lovely cottage located in our garden. In the garden we keep a number of farm animals, and it even contains a 2-hole (par 3) golfcourse. For reservations, contact: Piet and Henny Klomp Nijensteinseweg 45 4124 AT Hagestein The Netherlands +31 347 351258 or +31 622543510 Website: www.bnbnijenstein.nl</p>	<p>How to participate: Obtain an application form and send it to the CEAF administrator by March. The Family Support Committee reviews the applications in March to be ready by June of each year.</p> <p>How the committee decides who is eligible: a) Parents must be residents of Ontario in the two years prior to the application. b) The child or children must be enrolled in an OACS school for one year prior to the application. c) Household income must be below \$60,000. d) Proof of income is required but no review of assets. e) Decisions made by the Committee may be appealed to a special arbitrator. f) Tuition assistance cheques are issued in October of each year.</p> <p>Please direct inquiries to: CEAF Development Director Bruce Dykstra Call (home): 905-648-1681 or (cell) 905-515-9441. Or write to: Christian Economic Assistance Foundation Fiddlers Green Postal Outlet Ancaster ON L9G 4X2</p>
<p>Official Sea to Sea Motor home for sale</p> <p>1996 Gulf Stream, Conquest, 29 feet, 350 EFI - V8, 34,500 km, 4K Onan Gen. Fully loaded, excellent cond. \$33,500 or B.O. Call Ed Witvoet: 905-304-1912 Hamilton, Ontario</p>  <p>Give the gift that lasts all year — A subscription to the CHRISTIAN COURIER. Phone toll free: 1-800-969-4838</p> 		<p>E-mail: stewardship@ceaf.ca</p> <p>Web site: www.ceaf.ca</p>

Classifieds / Job Opportunities

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is an inter-denominational school established to serve the Dresden and Wallaceburg and surrounding area. This is a school of 75 students served by a great staff of dedicated teachers and supported by 42 families. We are looking for a new teaching **principal** who has a vision for leading a small school to future growth and striving for excellence in Christian education. Interested individuals should send their resumes, statement of faith, references and philosophy of education to:

**Wallaceburg Christian School
Principal Search Committee
693 Albert St, Wallaceburg ON N8A 1Y8**



Applications invited for the position of **part-time
Development Director (DD)**.

The DD will develop, implement and oversee programs to generate donor relations and corporate sponsorships as well as act as advisor for current and future fundraising activities. The successful candidate will possess abilities to share the school's vision with the community at large and gain financial support and commitments to the school, and be capable of using up-to-date software for communicating with and tracking donors. For further information, please contact the principal. Deadline for application: Jan 30, 2006. Send applications to:

**John Calvin Christian School
c/o Mr. Bob Moore, principal
286 Water Street, Guelph ON N1G 1B8
or by email: principal@JCCS.ca Website: www.jccs.ca**

**DORDT COLLEGE****Librarian Opening**

Dordt College is seeking someone to serve as a Reference and User Services Librarian. The person in this professional, full-time position would lead a team that provides reference service and instruction, formal and informal, traditional and electronic, to the faculty, staff, and students of the Dordt College community.

Qualifications include a graduate degree in librarianship from an American Library Association-accredited institution. Demonstrated teaching/training experience as well as experience in reference service and an academic library is desired. Candidates should possess a strong knowledge of computer and database applications of current and emerging technology including Windows, word processing, email and the World Wide Web as it relates to library services. Individuals who can work independently and as a part of a team, and possess the ability to communicate clearly, knowledgeably, and personally, both orally and in writing are encouraged to apply.

Candidates with a commitment to the Reformed faith and a desire to work with students and staff at a Christian college should send a letter of application and resume to Susan Droog, Director of Human Resources at the address below:

**Dordt College
498 Fourth Ave NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250
Phone: (712) 722-6011
Fax: (712) 722-1198
E-mail: sdroog@dordt.edu**

Dordt College does not discriminate as to sex, age, national origin, marital status or against those who are disabled.

**Dordt College
Faculty Positions**

Dordt College is seeking applications in the following areas:

August 2006

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Introductory and advanced-level courses. Candidates with interest in Human Resources or Economics or Accounting are particularly encouraged to apply.

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Teach in an interdisciplinary criminal justice program. Qualified applicants should have a background in such areas as criminal justice, criminology, sociology, or related field.

Education Faculty

Introductory and upper-level foundations courses and graduate courses. Teaching experience at the elementary or secondary level required, doctorate preferred.

Mathematics Faculty (Possible Opening)

Introductory and intermediate-level courses.

Nursing Faculty

Teach selected BSN completion courses; course development opportunities in the areas of Family, Community and Public Health and Professional Practice development. Master's degree and current license or eligibility for licensure as professional nurse in Iowa required.

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Introductory, social, and research courses.

Social Work Faculty, Director of Field Education

Teach in all areas of generalist BSW program; direct and coordinate BSW field education program. MSW and a minimum of 2 years post-MSW experience required; social work field practicum and supervision experience preferred.

Youth Ministry and Biblical Studies Faculty

Teach general education courses in biblical theology, a section of the first-term seminar, and courses related to the youth ministry emphasis

To learn more about a position and receive application materials, qualified persons committed to a Reformed, biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest and curriculum vita/resume to:

Dr. Rockne McCarthy
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dordt College
498 4th Ave. NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697

Facsimile: 712 722-4496
E-mail: vpaa@dordt.edu
Web site: www.dordt.edu/offices/academic_affairs

Dordt College is an equal opportunity institution that strongly encourages the applications of women, minorities, and disabled persons.

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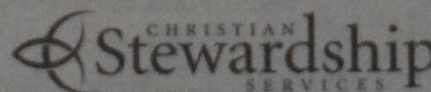
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Port Alberni - CJAV	7:00 pm	1240
Prince George - CIRX	7:00 am	94.3
Princeton - CHOR	8:00 am	1400
Smithers - CFBV	9:15 am	1230
Summerland - CHOR	8:00 am	1450
Vernon - CJIB	9:30 pm	94

ALBERTA

Brooks - CIBQ	8:30 am	1340
Ft. McMurray - CJOK	8:30 am	1230
High River - CHRB	6:30 pm	1140
Edmonton - CJCA	6:00 pm	930
Westlock - CFOK	7:30 am	1370

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Estevan - CJSL	8:00 am	1280
Weyburn - CFSL	8:00 am	1190

MANITOBA

Altona - CFAM	9:30 am	950
Steinbach - CHSM	9:30 am	1250
Winnipeg - CKJS	9:00 am	810

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Atikokan - CFAK	9:30 am	1240
Chatham - CFCO	6:30 am	630
Guelph - CJOY	8:30 am	1460
Hamilton - CHAM	7:30 am	820
Kapuskasing - CKAP	7:00 am	580
London - CKSL	7:00 am	1410
Oshawa - CKDO	8:00 am	1350
Owen Sound - CFOS	7:00 am	560
Pembroke - CHVR	10:00 am	96.7
Samia - CHOK	7:30 am	1070
Stratford - CJCS	8:45 am	1240
Tilsonburg - CKOT	9:02 am	101.3
Windsor - CKLW	7:30 am	800
Wingham - CKNX	10:30 am	920
Woodstock - CJFH	7:30 am	94.03

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Saint John - CHSJ	9:00 am	94.1
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Charlottetown - CFCY	7:00 am	630
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NOVA SCOTIA

Bridgewater - CKBW	7:30 am	1000
Digby - CKDY	6:00 am	1420
Halifax - CFDR	8:30 am	780
Liverpool - CKBW	7:30 am	94.5
Kentville - CKEN	8:30 am	1490
Middleton - CKAD	8:30 am	1350
New Glasgow - CKEC	7:30 am	1320
Shelburne - CKBW	7:30 am	93.1
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Rocky Mtn. House - CHBW 94.5 FM Sun. 8:30 am

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Prince Rupert - CIAJ 100.7 FM Sat. 10 am

MANITOBA

Altona - CFAM 950 AM Sun. 4 pm
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Bridgewater - CKBW 1000 AM Sun. 5:30 am

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Dec 16 Christmas Concert 7.30 p.m. at the Clinton CRC. **Clinton** Ontario. For tickets: Phone 519 565 2479, or 519 482 8671 See Dec. 5 issue for details.

Dec 17 A Christmas present for you; a Christmas present for Sierra Leone. A medley of folktales, music, laughter and sometimes poignancy are unleashed as wooden shoes meet flip flops and classic tunes. An evening of laughter, delight and celebration of God's goodness in the midst of sometimes anguish. 7:30 p.m. at Calvin CRC, 1475 Merivale Road, **Ottawa**. See Dec. 5 issue for all the details.

Dec 23 2nd annual Christmas sing-a-long concert with the Liberation Choir, 8.00 p.m. at Central Presbyterian Church, Hamilton, ON. See details in Dec. 5 issue.

2006

May 6, 7 Grace CRC, **Coburg**, 50th anniversary. All invited to join in celebrations. Biletting available. Call 905-372-3642 or email: grace.church@bellnet.ca. Website: www.cobourggrace.org

May 6 Combined 85 voices by the "Crescendo" Male Choir, St. Thomas and The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir present a "Concert of Sacred Song and Music". Special guest soloist Renee Stalenhoef, soprano. Saturday evening at 7:30 PM. St. Paul's Congregational Church, 450 Park Ave. Chatham Tickets \$10.00. Advance, Chatham: 351-7151. St. Thomas: 637-4357. Also available at the door.

May 7 Combined 85 voices by the "Crescendo" Male Choir, St. Thomas and The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir present a "Concert of Sacred Song and Music". Special guest soloist Renee Stalenhoef, soprano. Sunday evening at 7:30 p.m. Knox Presbyterian Church, 55 Hincks Street, St. Thomas. Freewill offering for the Canadian Bible Society. For information: (519) 637-4357.

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Saturday, **May 6, 2006 & Sunday May 7, 2006**
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Sunday, **July 16, 2006**
Picnic at the Conference Grounds

Friday, **November 3, 2006**
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Thanking God always for His faithfulness.

Address:
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News

CLAC breaks ground for new addition



Front row: Christine Cavers, Maureen Dunn, Kim Jantzi; Back Row: Dean Antonides, Matthew Dekkers, Jim Doornbos (General Manager), Hank Beekhuis (Regional Director), Andrew Regnerus, Pat Capra, Lindsey Sieders, Pam Bok, Jonathan Schat

Grimsby, ON – The Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) held a ground breaking ceremony for its new addition on Nov. 18. Hank Beekhuis, Regional Director for the union, announced that the construction has begun on a 6000 square foot addition to the CLAC's Niagara office located at 89 South Service Road in Grimsby. The union has outgrown its current building due to the continual growth it has experienced over the last 10 years.

The Grimsby office is the headquarters for six CLAC locals based in the Niagara area, representing workers in health care, construction, security, education and volunteer firefighters. It is also the administrative centre for its provincial Benefit and Pension operations.

Over the past 10 years CLAC's membership has more than doubled to 4500 in the area and its staff complement has reached 24.

"As we expand our programs and membership, the need for new meeting space, training facilities and offices

are a natural consequence," said Mr. Beekhuis. "The new building will be built by our own members and that is satisfying in itself."

The Christian Labour Association is the fastest growing labour union in Canada and is a value-based trade union that attempts to apply Christian social principles of integrity, fairness, respect and dignity to the workplace.

CLAC is an independent union which advocates freedom of association and worker choice. "In our view, labour and management need to work together in a way that balances strong and effective worker advocacy, with the long term interest of the work community," said Isobel Farrell, another union representative based in the Grimsby office.

This brand of trade unionism, which combines strong advocacy and respect for both labour and management, is making significant inroads. CLAC is now ranked in the top 40 unions in Canada out of over 1000 registered trade unions.

Students showcase musical talents to buy tents for Pakistan quake victims

Grace Miedema
CRC Chaplain Fanshawe

Christian students at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario organized a coffeehouse in response to the Micah Challenge that they had been learning about this fall. It was done under the sponsorship of Christian Reformed campus ministry. They had learned that natural disasters are one reason for poverty, and although giving fatigue seems to have set in a bit after all the disasters this year and the Muslims of Pakistan are a long way from London, these students were ready to raise money for tents for people about to freeze in the mountains.

They thought a coffeehouse would be the best or most fun way to do it. They solicited acts, advertised, baked, sold tickets, put donation boxes throughout the college, and held a bake sale the next day with the leftover baking donations – all for a grand total of \$414.77.

Through the CRWRC this donation is

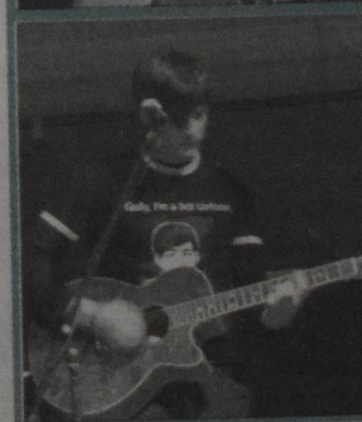
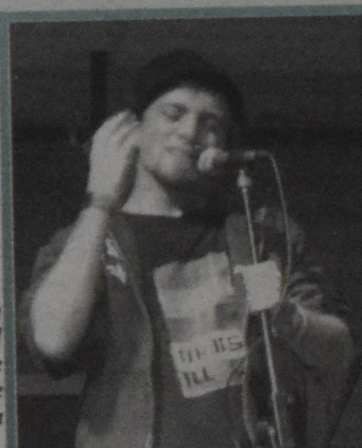
matched by CIDA, so the giving is multiplied. Each tent costs about US\$252.00 but can help save the lives of up to 10 people, so the students were very happy with the outcome.

For me as chaplain it was a very gratifying project as well since the students took a lot of initiative themselves, they can see how their efforts have paid off, and they realize that we can make a difference. The students also appreciated being able to send a positive Christian message of care to the Muslims of Pakistan, in the face of military tensions with the West in that area.

They also enjoyed showcasing their music and spoken word, and sharing a variety of original music, Christian lyrics, and top 40 hits in front of a good sized coffeehouse crowd.

Will Kinchlea did a social conscience rap using the alphabet as a guide.

Dan Nixon played some original compositions with Christian lyrics on his guitar.



News briefs

Ghost planes?

Every major newspaper in Canada, and some of the minor ones as well, carried stories about ghost planes and secret flights from the US into Canada. They are reputed, alleged, rumored to be owned by companies that are fronts for the CIA. The mystery plane or planes have been landing in remote airports in northern Ontario for refueling.

These flights have engendered all sorts of speculation. Most papers suggest they are part of the US war on terror. Is Canada in cahoots with the US in transporting anonymous prisoners to secret prisons? Are they stopping here on the way to hidden interrogation centers rumored to be located in Europe? Journalists, politicians, human rights advocates and Michael Moore are understandably suspicious. This is, after all, the age of deception, spin and conspiracies, when nothing is what it seems.

Knowing this, the pundits should look further. This seems to be related to war and terror. But CC has come to the conclusion that it is only seemingly so. It is actually part of a much more nefarious plot by the USA.

All that activity in our northern regions at this time of the year can mean only one thing. The CIA is searching for the operating base of Santa Claus and his elves. This time it is not about oil; it is about something far more precious to retailers – Christmas. And what would Christmas be without Santa Claus?

Knowing how pitifully ill equipped Canada is to safeguard Santa's northern base, the White House has declared the safe-keeping of Santa to be part of its national security.

It is our contention that the US, once it has located Santa's secret base of operations, plans to move it to an abandoned missile silo in North Dakota.

It's high time for Canada to revive the Cold War practice of stationing troops near the North Pole. At stake is our reputation as the protector of Santa Claus, who is nothing less than the goose that lays the golden egg.

"Holiday tree"

To stick with the holiday theme – oops! Christmas theme – Canada took the lead in the Christmas wars south of the border this year. Nova Scotia has been sending a large evergreen to Boston for years as an expression of gratitude for help in the distant past. The bigwigs in Boston referred to it as a "Holiday Tree."

The Nova Scotian who cut the tree took exception to that designation. He promptly informed the Bostonians that what he sent them was not a Holiday Tree but a Christmas Tree. And he added that if they insisted that it was to be a Holiday Tree they should send it back and he would put it through the chipper. The chipper tree chopper, Donnie Hatt, instantly became an American hero to the evangelical right in the fight against the anti-Christmas terrorists.

Jerry Falwell offered to take anyone to court who tried to forbid God-fearing Americans from calling a Christmas tree a Christmas tree.

I grew up in northern Canada and I ought to know: all those trees that stay green all winter are called Christmas trees. Once I had an unbelieving teacher in the public school who tried to tell us they weren't Christmas trees but pine trees and fir trees. But I knew better. Why else did they stay green except for the sake of Christmas?

That's why I was very puzzled when in those days evangelicals said they were a pagan symbol and had nothing to do with Christmas. After all, it was God who made Christmas trees, wasn't it?